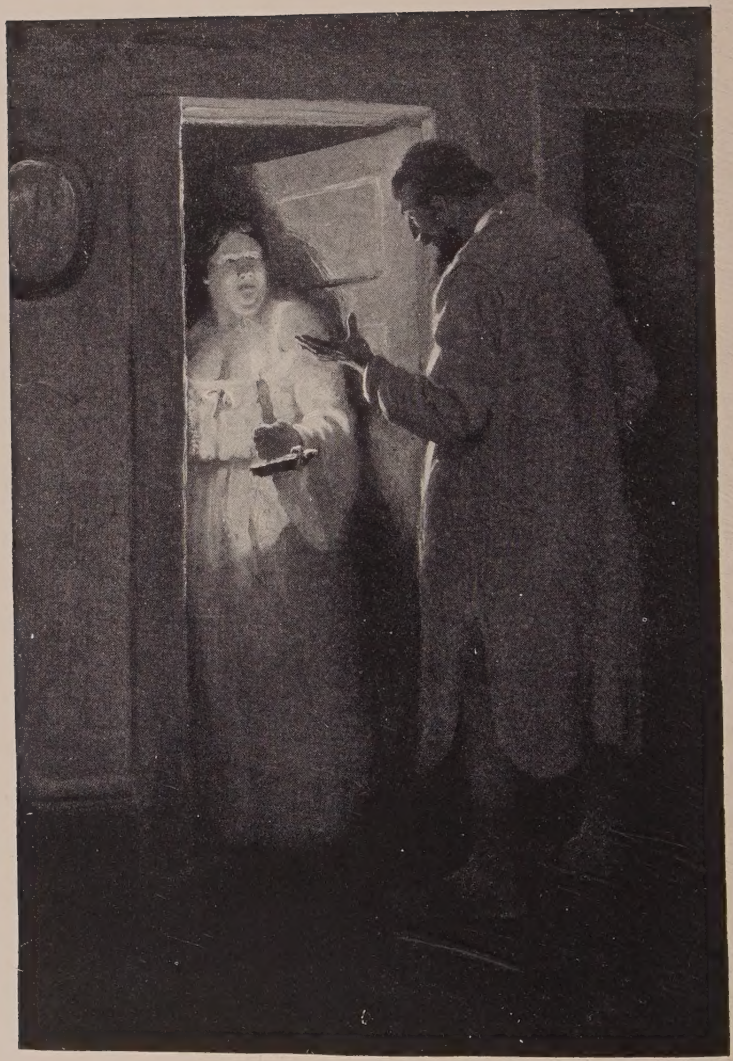

"HOW SILLY YOU ARE! WHAT DOES IT MATTER TO YOU?" HE SAID.

Inclusive Edition

THE COMPLETE WORKS
OF
Guy de Maupassant

BALL-OF-TALLOW
OUR HEART
and other stories

Translations, Critical and Interpretative Essays by

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FRONTISPIECES BY J. E. ALLEN

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OUR HEART

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BALL OF TALLOW

FOR several days in succession fragments of a defeated army had passed through the town. They were mere disorganized bands, not disciplined forces. The men wore long, dirty beards and tattered uniforms; they advanced in listless fashion, without a flag, without a leader. All seemed exhausted, worn out, incapable of thought or resolve, marching onward merely by force of habit, and dropping to the ground with fatigue the moment they halted. One saw, in particular, many enlisted men, peaceful citizens, men who lived quietly on their income, bending beneath the weight of their rifles; and little active volunteers, easily frightened but full of enthusiasm, as eager to attack as they were ready to take to flight; and amid these, a sprinkling of red-breeched soldiers, the pitiful remnant of a division cut down in a great battle; somber artillerymen, side by side with nondescript foot-soldiers; and, here and there, the gleam-

ing helmet of a heavy-footed dragoon who had difficulty in keeping up with the quicker pace of the soldiers of the line.

Legions of irregulars with high-sounding names —" Avengers of Defeat," " Citizens of the Tomb," " Brethren in Death "—passed in their turn, looking like banditti.

Their leaders, former drapers or grain merchants, or tallow or soap handlers—warriors by force of circumstance, officers by reason of their mustachios or their money—covered with weapons and flannel and braid, and gold lace, spoke in an impressive manner, discussed plans of campaign, and behaved as though they alone bore the fortunes of dying France on their braggart shoulders; though, in truth, they frequently were afraid of their own men—scoundrels often brave without limit, but dishonest and debauched.

Rumor had it that the Prussians were about to enter Rouen.

The members of the National Guard, who for the past two months had been reconnoitering with the utmost caution in the neighboring woods, occasionally shooting their own sentinels, and making ready for fight whenever a rabbit rustled in the undergrowth, had now returned to their homes. Their arms, their uniforms, all the death-dealing paraphernalia with which they had terrified all the milestones along the highroad for eight miles round, had suddenly and marvelously disappeared.

The last of the French soldiers had just crossed the Seine on their way to Pont-Audemer, through Saint-Sever and Bourg-Archard, and in their rear the vanquished General, powerless to do aught with the forlorn remnants of his army, himself dismayed

at the final overthrow of a nation accustomed to victory, and disastrously beaten despite its legendary bravery, walked between two orderlies.

Then a profound calm, a shuddering, silent dread, settled on the city. Many a round-paunched citizen, emasculated by years devoted to business, anxiously awaited the conquerors, trembling lest his roasting-jacks or kitchen knives should be looked upon as weapons.

Life seemed to have stopped short; the shops were shut, the streets deserted. Now and then an inhabitant, awed by the silence, glided swiftly by in the shadow of the walls. The anguish of suspense made men even desire the arrival of the enemy.

In the afternoon of the day following the departure of the French troops, a number of uhlans, coming no one knew whence, passed rapidly through the town. A little later on, a black mass descended St. Catherine's Hill, while two other invading bodies appeared respectively on the Darnetal and the Boisguillaume roads. The advance guards of the three corps arrived at precisely the same moment at the Square of the Hôtel de Ville, and the German army poured through all the adjacent streets, its battalions making the pavement ring with their firm, measured tread.

Orders shouted in an unknown, guttural tongue rose to the windows of the seemingly dead, deserted houses; while behind the fast-closed shutters eager eyes peered forth at the victors—masters now of the city, its fortunes, and its lives by "right of war." The inhabitants, in their darkened rooms, were possessed by that terror which follows in the wake of cataclysms, of deadly up-

heavals of the earth, against which all human skill and strength are vain. For the same thing happens whenever the established order of things is upset, when security no longer exists, when all those rights usually protected by the laws of man or of Nature are at the mercy of unreasoning, savage force. The earthquake crushing a whole nation under falling roofs; the flood let loose, and engulfing in its swirling depths the corpses of drowned peasants, along with dead oxen and beams torn from shattered houses; or the army, covered with glory, murdering those who defend themselves, making prisoners of the rest, pillaging in the name of the Sword, and giving thanks to God to the thunder of cannon—all these are appalling scourges, which destroy all belief in eternal justice, all that confidence we have been taught to feel in the protection of Heaven and the reason of man.

Small detachments of soldiers knocked at each door, and then disappeared within the houses; for the vanquished saw they would have to be civil to their conquerors.

At the end of a short time, once the first terror had subsided, calm was again restored. In many houses the Prussian officer ate at the same table with the family. He was often well-bred, and, out of politeness, expressed sympathy with France and repugnance at being compelled to take part in the war. This sentiment was received with gratitude; besides, his protection might be needful some day or other. By the exercise of tact the number of men quartered in one's house might be reduced; and why should one provoke the hostility of a person on whom one's whole welfare depended? Such conduct would savor less of bravery than of fool-

hardiness. And foolhardiness is no longer a failing of the citizens of Rouen as it was in the days when their city earned renown by its heroic defenses. Last of all—final argument based on the national politeness—the folk of Rouen said to one another that it was only right to be civil in one's own house, provided there was no public exhibition of familiarity with the foreigner. Out of doors, therefore, citizen and soldier did not know each other; but in the house both chatted freely, and each evening the German remained a little longer warming himself at the hospitable hearth.

Even the town itself resumed by degrees its ordinary aspect. The French seldom walked abroad, but the streets swarmed with Prussian soldiers. Moreover, the officers of the Blue Hussars, who arrogantly dragged their instruments of death along the pavements, seemed to hold the simple townsmen in but little more contempt than did the French cavalry officers who had drunk at the same cafés the year before.

But there was something in the air, a something strange and subtle, an intolerable foreign atmosphere like a penetrating odor—the odor of invasion. It permeated dwellings and places of public resort, changed the taste of food, made one imagine one's self in far-distant lands, amid dangerous, barbaric tribes.

The conquerors exacted money, much money. The inhabitants paid what was asked; they were rich. But the wealthier a Norman tradesman becomes the more he suffers at having to part with anything that belongs to him, at having to see any portion of his substance pass into the hands of another.

Nevertheless, within six or seven miles of the town, along the course of the river as it flows onward to Croisset, Dieppedalle, and Biessart, boatmen and fishermen often hauled to the surface of the water the body of a German, bloated in his uniform, killed by a blow from knife or club, his head crushed by a stone, or perchance pushed from some bridge into the stream below. The mud of the river-bed swallowed up these obscure acts of vengeance—savage, yet legitimate; these unrecorded deeds of bravery; these silent attacks fraught with greater danger than battles fought in broad day, and surrounded, moreover, with no halo of romance. For hatred of the foreigner ever arms a few intrepid souls, ready to die for an idea.

At last, as the invaders, though subjecting the town to the strictest discipline, had not committed any of the deeds of horror with which they had been credited while on their triumphal march, the people grew bolder, and the necessities of business again animated the breasts of the local merchants. Some of these had important commercial interests at Havre—occupied at present by the French army—and wished to attempt to reach that port by overland route to Dieppe, taking the boat from there.

Through the influence of the German officers whose acquaintance they had made, they obtained a permit to leave town from the general in command.

A large four-horse coach having, therefore, been engaged for the journey, and ten passengers having given in their names to the proprietor, they decided to start on a certain Tuesday morning before daybreak, to avoid attracting a crowd.

The ground had been frozen hard for some time

past, and about three o'clock on Monday afternoon large black clouds from the north shed their burden of snow uninterruptedly all through that evening and night.

At half-past four in the morning the travelers met in the courtyard of the Hôtel de Normandie, where they were to take their seats in the coach.

They were still half asleep, and shivering with cold under their wraps. They could see one another but indistinctly in the darkness, and the mountain of heavy winter wraps in which each was swathed made them look like a gathering of obese priests in their long cassocks. But two men recognized each other, a third accosted them, and the three began to talk. "I am bringing my wife," said one. "So am I." "And I, too." The first speaker added: "We shall not return to Rouen, and if the Prussians approach Havre we will cross to England." All three, it turned out, had made the same plans, being of similar disposition and temperament.

Still the horses were not harnessed. A small lantern carried by a stable-boy emerged now and then from one dark doorway to disappear immediately in another. The stamping of horses' hoofs, deadened by the dung and straw of the stable, was heard from time to time, and from inside the building issued a man's voice, talking to the animals and swearing at them. A faint tinkle of bells showed that the harness was being got ready; this tinkle soon developed into a continuous jingling, louder or softer according to the movements of the horse, sometimes stopping altogether, then breaking out in a sudden peal accompanied by a pawing of the ground by an iron-shod hoof.

The door suddenly closed. All noise ceased. The frozen townsmen were silent; they remained motionless, stiff with cold.

A thick curtain of glistening white flakes fell ceaselessly to the ground; it obliterated all outlines, enveloped all objects in an icy mantle of foam; nothing was to be heard throughout the length and breadth of the silent, winter-bound city save the vague, nameless rustle of falling snow—a sensation rather than a sound—the gentle mingling of light atoms which seemed to fill all space, to cover the whole world.

The man reappeared with his lantern, leading by a rope a melancholy-looking horse, evidently being led out against his inclination. The hostler placed him beside the pole, fastened the traces, and spent some time in walking round him to make sure that the harness was all right; for he could use only one hand, the other being engaged in holding the lantern. As he was about to fetch the second horse he noticed the motionless group of travelers, already white with snow, and said to them: "Why don't you get inside the coach? You'd be under shelter, at least."

This did not seem to have occurred to them, and they at once took his advice. The three men seated their wives at the far end of the coach, then got in themselves; lastly the other vague, snow-shrouded forms clambered to the remaining places without a word.

The floor was covered with straw, into which the feet sank. The ladies at the far end, having brought with them little copper foot-warmers heated by means of a kind of chemical fuel, proceeded to light these, and spent some time in ex-

patiating in low tones on their advantages, saying over and over again things which they had all known for a long time.

At last, six horses instead of four having been harnessed to the diligence, on account of the heavy roads, a voice outside asked: "Is every one there?" To which a voice from the interior replied: "Yes," and they set out.

The vehicle moved slowly, slowly, at a snail's pace; the wheels sank into the snow; the entire body of the coach creaked and groaned; the horses slipped, puffed, steamed, and the coachman's long whip cracked incessantly, flying hither and thither, coiling up, then flinging out its length like a slender serpent, as it lashed some rounded flank, which instantly grew tense as it strained in further effort.

But the day grew apace. Those light flakes which one traveler, a native of Rouen, had compared to a rain of cotton fell no longer. A murky light filtered through dark, heavy clouds, which made the country more dazzlingly white by contrast, a whiteness broken sometimes by a row of tall trees spangled with hoarfrost, or by a cottage roof hooded in snow.

Within the coach the passengers eyed one another curiously in the dim light of dawn.

Right at the back, in the best seats of all, Monsieur and Madame Loiseau, wholesale wine merchants of the Rue Grand-Pont, slumbered opposite each other. Formerly clerk to a merchant who had failed in business, Loiseau had bought his master's interest, and made a fortune for himself. He sold very bad wine at a very low price to the retail dealers in the country, and had the reputation, among his friends and acquaintances, of being a

cunning rogue, a true Norman, full of quips and wiles. So well established was his character as a cheat that, in the mouths of the citizens of Rouen, the very name of Loiseau became a byword for sharp practice.

Above and beyond this, Loiseau was noted for his practical jokes of every description—his tricks, good or ill-natured; and no one could mention his name without adding at once: "He's an extraordinary man—Loiseau." He was undersized and pot-bellied, had a florid face with grayish whiskers.

His wife—tall, strong, determined, with a loud voice and decided manner—represented the spirit of order and arithmetic in the business house which Loiseau enlivened by his jovial activity.

Beside them, dignified in bearing, belonging to a superior caste, sat Monsieur Carré-Lamadon, a man of considerable importance, a king in the cotton trade, proprietor of three spinning-mills, officer of the Legion of Honor, and member of the General Council. During the whole time the Empire was in the ascendancy he remained the chief of the well-disposed Opposition, merely in order to command a higher value for his devotion when he should rally to the cause which he meanwhile opposed with "courteous weapons," to use his own expression.

Madame Carré-Lamadon, much younger than her husband, was the consolation of all the officers of good family quartered at Rouen. Pretty, slender, graceful, she sat opposite her husband, curled up in her furs, and gazing mournfully at the sorry interior of the coach.

Her neighbors, the Comte and Comtesse Hubert de Bréville, bore one of the noblest and most ancient names in Normandy. The Count, a nobleman

advanced in years and of aristocratic bearing, strove to enhance, by every artifice of the toilet, his natural resemblance to King Henry IV, who, according to a legend of which the family were inordinately proud, had been the favored lover of a De Bréville lady, and father of her child—the frail one's husband having, in recognition of this fact, been made a count and governor of a province.

A colleague of Monsieur Carré-Lamadon in the General Council, Count Hubert represented the Orléanist party in his department. The story of his marriage with the daughter of a small shipowner at Nantes had always remained more or less of a mystery. But as the Countess had an air of unmistakable breeding, entertained faultlessly, and was even supposed to have been loved by a son of Louis-Philippe, the nobility vied with one another in doing her honor, and her drawing-room remained the most select in the whole countryside—the only one which retained the old spirit of gallantry, and to which access was not easy.

The fortune of the Brévilles, all in real estate, amounted, it was said, to five hundred thousand francs a year.

These six people occupied the farther end of the coach, and represented Society—with an income—the strong, established society of good people with religion and principle.

It happened by chance that all the women were seated on the same side; and the Countess had, moreover, as neighbors two nuns, who spent the time in fingering their long rosaries and murmuring paternosters and aves. One of them was old, and so deeply pitted with smallpox that she looked

for all the world as if she had received a charge of shot full in the face. The other, of sickly appearance, had a pretty but wasted countenance, and a narrow, consumptive chest, sapped by that devouring faith which is the making of martyrs and visionaries.

A man and woman, sitting opposite the two nuns, attracted all eyes.

The man—a well-known character—was Cornudet, the democrat, the terror of all respectable people. For the past twenty years his big red beard had been on terms of intimate acquaintance with the tankards of all the republican cafés. With the help of his comrades and brethren he had dissipated a respectable fortune left him by his father, an old-established confectioner, and he now impatiently awaited the Republic, that he might at last be rewarded with the post he had earned by his revolutionary orgies. On the fourth of September—possibly as the result of a practical joke—he was led to believe that he had been appointed prefect; but when he attempted to take up the duties of the position the clerks in charge of the office refused to recognize his authority, and he was compelled in consequence to retire. A good sort of fellow in other respects, inoffensive and obliging, he had thrown himself zealously into the work of making an organized defence of the town. He had had pits dug in the level country, young forest trees felled, and traps set on all the roads; then at the approach of the enemy, thoroughly satisfied with his preparations, he had hastily returned to the town. He thought he might now do more good at Havre, where new intrenchments would soon be necessary.

The woman, who belonged to the courtesan

class, was celebrated for an *embonpoint* unusual for her age, which had earned for her the sobriquet of Boule de Suif ("Tallow-Ball"). Short and rotund, fat as a pig, with puffy fingers constricted at the joints, looking like rows of short sausages; with a shiny, tightly-stretched skin and an enormous bust filling out the bodice of her dress, she was yet attractive and much sought after, owing to her fresh and pleasing appearance. Her face was like a crimson apple, a peony-bud just bursting into bloom; she had two magnificent dark eyes, fringed with thick, heavy lashes, which cast a shadow into their depths; her mouth was small, ripe, kissable, and was furnished with the tiniest of white teeth.

As soon as she was recognized the respectable matrons of the party began to whisper among themselves, and the words "hussy" and "public scandal" were uttered so loudly that Boule de Suif raised her head. She forthwith cast such a challenging, bold look at her neighbors that a sudden silence fell on the company, and all lowered their eyes, with the exception of Loiseau, who watched her with evident interest.

But conversation was soon resumed among the three ladies, whom the presence of this girl had suddenly drawn together in the bonds of friendship —one might almost say in those of intimacy. They decided that they ought to combine, as it were, in their dignity as wives in face of this shameless hussy; for legitimized love always despises its easy-going brother.

The three men, also, brought together by a certain conservative instinct awakened by the presence of Cornudet, spoke of money matters in a tone

expressive of contempt for the poor. Count Hubert related the losses he had sustained at the hands of the Prussians, spoke of the cattle which had been stolen from him, the crops which had been ruined, with the easy manner of a nobleman who was also a tenfold millionaire, whom such reverses would scarcely inconvenience for a single year. Monsieur Carré-Lamadon, a man of wide experience in the cotton industry, had taken care to send six hundred thousand francs to England as provision against the rainy day he was always anticipating. As for Loiseau, he had managed to sell to the French commissariat department all the wines he had in stock, so that the State now owed him a considerable sum, which he hoped to receive at Havre.

And all three eyed one another in friendly, well-disposed fashion. Although of varying social status, they were united in the brotherhood of money—in that vast freemasonry made up of those who possess, who can jingle gold whenever they choose to put their hands into their breeches' pockets.

The coach went along so slowly that at ten o'clock in the morning it had not covered twelve miles. Three times the men of the party got out and climbed the hills on foot. The passengers were becoming uneasy, for they had counted on lunching at Tôtes, and it seemed now as if they would hardly arrive there before nightfall. Every one was eagerly looking out for an inn by the roadside, when, suddenly, the coach foundered in a snowdrift, and it took two hours to extricate it.

As appetites increased, their spirits fell; no inn, no wine shop could be discovered, the approach of

the Prussians and the transit of the starving French troops having frightened away all business.

The men sought food in the farmhouses beside the road, but could not find so much as a crust of bread; for the suspicious peasant invariably hid his stores for fear of being pillaged by the soldiers, who, being entirely without food, would take violent possession of everything they found.

About one o'clock Loiseau announced that he positively had a big hollow in his stomach. They had all been suffering in the same way for some time, and the increasing gnawings of hunger had put an end to all conversation.

Now and then some one yawned, another followed his example, and each in turn, according to his character, breeding, and social position, yawned either quietly or noisily, placing his hand before the gaping void whence issued breath condensed into vapor.

Several times Boule de Suif stooped, as if searching for something under her petticoats. She would hesitate a moment, look at her neighbors, and then quietly sit upright again. All faces were pale and drawn. Loiseau declared he would give a thousand francs for a knuckle of ham. His wife made an involuntary and quickly checked gesture of protest. It always hurt her to hear of money being squandered, and she could not even understand jokes on such a subject.

"As a matter of fact, I don't feel well," said the Count. "Why did I not think of bringing provisions?" Each one reproached himself in similar fashion.

Cornudet, however, had a bottle of rum, which he offered to his neighbors. They all coldly refused

except Loiseau, who took a sip, and returned the bottle with thanks, saying: "That's good stuff; it warms one up, and cheats the appetite." The alcohol put him in good humor, and he proposed they should do as the sailors did in the song: eat the fattest of the passengers. This indirect allusion to Boule de Suif shocked the respectable members of the party. No one replied; only Cornudet smiled. The two good sisters had ceased to mumble their rosary, and, with hands enfolded in their wide sleeves, sat motionless, their eyes steadfastly cast down, doubtless offering up as a sacrifice to Heaven the suffering it had sent them.

At last, at three o'clock, as they were in the midst of an apparently limitless plain, with not a single village in sight, Boule de Suif stooped quickly, and drew from underneath the seat a large basket covered with a white napkin.

From this she extracted first of all a small earthenware plate and a silver drinking-cup, then an enormous dish containing two whole chickens cut into joints and imbedded in jelly. The basket was seen to contain other good things: pies, fruit, dainties of all sorts—provisions, in fine, for a three days' journey, rendering their owner independent of wayside inns. The necks of four bottles protruded from among the food. She took a chicken wing, and began to eat it daintily, together with one of those rolls called in Normandy *Régence*.

All looks were directed toward her. An odor of food filled the air, causing nostrils to dilate, mouths to water, and jaws to contract painfully. The scorn of the ladies for this disreputable female grew positively ferocious; they would have liked to kill her, or throw her and her drinking-cup, her

basket, and her provisions, out of the coach into the snow of the road below.

But Loiseau's gaze was fixed greedily on the dish of chicken. He said:

"Well, well, this lady had more forethought than the rest of us. Some people think of everything."

She looked up at him.

"Would you like some, sir? It is hard to go on fasting all day."

He bowed.

"Upon my soul, I can't refuse; I cannot hold out another minute. All is fair in war time, is it not, Madame?" And, casting a glance on those around, he added:

"At times like this it is very pleasant to meet with obliging people."

He spread a newspaper over his knees to avoid soiling his trousers, and, with a pocket knife he always carried, helped himself to a chicken leg coated with jelly, which he thereupon proceeded to devour.

Then Boule de Suif, in low, humble tones, invited the nuns to partake of her repast. They both accepted the offer unhesitatingly, and after a few stammered words of thanks began to eat quickly, without raising their eyes. Neither did Cornudet refuse his neighbor's offer, and, in combination with the nuns, a sort of table was formed by opening out the newspaper over the four pairs of knees.

Mouths kept opening and shutting, ferociously masticating and devouring the food. Loiseau, in his corner, was hard at work, and in low tones urged his wife to follow his example. She held out for a long time, but overstrained nature gave way at last.

Her husband, assuming his politest manner, asked their "charming companion" if he might be allowed to offer Madame Loiseau a small helping.

"Why, certainly, sir," she replied, with an amiable smile, holding out the dish.

When the first bottle of claret was opened some embarrassment was caused by the fact that there was only one drinking-cup, but this was passed from one to another, after being wiped. Cornudet alone, doubtless in a spirit of gallantry, raised to his own lips that part of the rim which was still moist from those of his fair neighbor.

Then, surrounded by people who were eating, and well-nigh suffocated by the odor of food, the Comte and Comtesse de Bréville and Monsieur and Madame Carré-Lamadon endured that hateful form of torture which has perpetrated the name of Tantalus. All at once the manufacturer's young wife heaved a sigh which made every one turn and look at her; she was white as the snow without; her eyes closed, her head fell forward; she had fainted. Her husband, beside himself, implored the help of his neighbors. No one seemed to know what to do until the elder of the two nuns, raising the patient's head, placed Boule de Suif's drinking-cup to her lips, and made her swallow a few drops of wine. The pretty invalid moved, opened her eyes, smiled, and declared in a feeble voice that she was all right again. But, to prevent a recurrence of the catastrophe, the nun made her drink a cupful of claret, adding: "It's just hunger—that's what is wrong with you."

Then Boule de Suif, blushing and embarrassed, stammered, looking at the four passengers who were still fasting:

"*Mon Dieu,* if I might offer these ladies and gentlemen——"

She stopped short, fearing a snub. But Loiseau continued:

"Hang it all, in such a case as this we are all brothers and sisters and ought to assist each other. Come, come, ladies, don't stand on ceremony, for goodness' sake! Do we even know whether we shall find a house in which to pass the night? At our present rate of going we sha'n't be at Tôtes till midday to-morrow."

They hesitated, no one daring to be the first to accept. But the Count settled the question. He turned toward the abashed girl, and in his most distinguished manner said:

"We accept gratefully, Madame."

As usual, it was only the first step that cost. The Rubicon once crossed, they set to work with a will. The basket was emptied. It still contained a *pâté de foie gras,* a lark pie, a piece of smoked tongue, Crassane pears, Pont-Léveque gingerbread, fancy cakes, and a cup full of pickled gherkins and onions—Boule de Suif, like all women, being very fond of indigestible things.

They could not eat this girl's provisions without speaking to her. So they began to talk, stiffly at first; then, as she seemed by no means forward, with greater freedom. Mesdames de Bréville and Carré-Lamadon, who were accomplished women of the world, were gracious and tactful. The Countess especially displayed that amiable condescension characteristic of great ladies whom no contact with baser mortals can sully, and was absolutely charming. But the sturdy Madame Loiseau continued morose, speaking little and eating much.

Conversation naturally turned on the war. Terrible stories were told about the Prussians, deeds of bravery were recounted of the French; and all these people who were fleeing themselves were ready to pay homage to the courage of their compatriots. Personal experiences soon followed, and Boule de Suif related with genuine emotion, and with that warmth of language not uncommon in women of her class and temperament, how it came about that she had left Rouen.

"I thought at first that I should be able to stay," she said. "My house was well stocked with provisions, and it seemed better to put up with feeding a few soldiers than to banish myself goodness knows where. But when I saw these Prussians it was too much for me! My blood boiled with rage; I wept the whole day for very shame. Oh, if only I had been a man! I looked at them from my window—the fat swine, with their pointed helmets!—and my maid held my hands to keep me from throwing my furniture down on them. Then some of them were quartered on me; I flew at the throat of the first one who entered. They are just as easy to strangle as other men! And I'd have been the death of that one if I hadn't been dragged away from him by my hair. I had to hide after that. And as soon as I could get an opportunity I left the place, and here I am."

She was warmly congratulated. She rose in the estimation of her companions, who had not been so brave; and Cornudet listened to her with the approving and benevolent smile of an apostle, the smile a priest might wear in listening to a disciple praising God; for long-bearded democrats of his type have a monopoly of patriotism, just as priests

have a monopoly of religion. He held forth in turn, with dogmatic self-assurance, in the style of the proclamations daily pasted on the walls of the town, winding up with a specimen of stump oratory in which he reviled "that besotted fool of a Louis-Napoleon."

But Boule de Suif was indignant, for she was an ardent Bonapartist. She turned as red as a cherry, and stammered in her wrath: "I'd just like to have seen you in his place—you and your sort! There would have been some sense in that. It was you who betrayed that man. It would be impossible to live in France if we were governed by such rascals as you!"

Cornudet, unmoved by this tirade, still smiled a superior, contemptuous smile; and one felt that high words were impending, when the Count interposed, and, not without difficulty, succeeded in calming the exasperated woman, saying that all sincere opinions ought to be respected. But the Countess and the manufacturer's wife, imbued with the unreasoning hatred of the upper classes for the Republic, and instinct, moreover, with the affection felt by all women for the pomp and circumstance of despotic government, were drawn, in spite of themselves, toward this dignified young woman, whose opinions coincided so closely with their own.

The basket was empty. The ten people had finished its contents without difficulty amid general regret that it did not hold more. Conversation went on a little longer, though it flagged somewhat after the passengers had finished eating.

Night fell, the darkness grew deeper and deeper, and the cold made Boule de Suif shiver, in spite of her plumpness. So Madame de Bréville offered her

her foot-warmer, the fuel of which had been several times renewed since the morning, and she accepted the offer at once, for her feet were icy cold. Mesdames Carré-Lamadon and Loiseau gave theirs to the nuns.

The driver lighted his lanterns. They cast a bright gleam on a cloud of vapor which hovered over the sweating flanks of the horses, and on the roadside snow, which seemed to unroll as they went along in the changing light of the lamps.

All was now indistinguishable in the coach; but suddenly a movement occurred in the corner occupied by Boule de Suif and Cornudet; and Loiseau, peering into the gloom, fancied he saw the big, bearded democrat move hastily to one side, as if he had received a well-directed, though noiseless, blow in the dark.

Tiny lights glimmered ahead. It was Tôtes. The coach had been on the road eleven hours, which, with the three hours allotted the horses in four periods for feeding and breathing, made fourteen. It entered the town, and stopped before the Hôtel du Commerce.

The coach door opened; a well-known noise made all the travelers start; it was the clanging of a scabbard on the pavement; then a voice called out something in German.

Although the coach had come to a standstill, no one got out; it looked as if they were afraid of being murdered the moment they left their seats. Thereupon the driver appeared, holding in his hand one of his lanterns, which cast a sudden glow on the interior of the coach, lighting up the double row of startled faces, mouths agape, and eyes wide open in surprise and terror.

Beside the driver stood in the full light a German officer, a tall young man, fair and slender, tightly incased in his uniform like a woman in her corset, his flat, waxed cap, tilted to one side of his head, making him look like an English hotel runner. His exaggerated mustache, long and straight and tapering to a point at either end in a single blond hair that could hardly be seen, seemed to weigh down the corners of his mouth and give a droop to his lips.

In Alsatian French he requested the travelers to alight, saying stiffly:

"Kindly get down, ladies and gentlemen."

The two nuns were the first to obey, manifesting the docility of holy women accustomed to submission on every occasion. Next appeared the Count and Countess, followed by the manufacturer and his wife, after whom came Loiseau, pushing his larger and better half before him.

"Good day, sir," he said to the officer as he put his foot to the ground, acting on an impulse born of prudence rather than of politeness. The other, insolent like all in authority, merely stared without replying.

Boule de Suif and Cornudet, though near the door, were the last to alight, grave and dignified before the enemy. The stout girl tried to control herself and appear calm; the democrat stroked his long russet beard with a somewhat trembling hand. Both strove to maintain their dignity, knowing well that at such a time each individual is always looked upon as more or less typical of his nation; and, also, resenting the complaisant attitude of their companions, Boule de Suif tried to wear a bolder front than her neighbors, the virtuous women, while

he, feeling that it was incumbent on him to set a good example, kept up the attitude of resistance which he had first assumed when he undertook to mine the high-roads round Rouen.

They entered the spacious kitchen of the inn, and the German, having demanded the passports signed by the general in command, in which were mentioned the name, description, and profession of each traveler, inspected them all minutely, comparing their appearance with the written particulars.

Then he said brusquely: "All right," and turned on his heel.

They breathed freely. All were still hungry; so supper was ordered. Half an hour was required for its preparation, and while two servants were apparently engaged in getting it ready the travelers went to look at their rooms. These all opened off a long corridor, at the end of which was a glazed door with a number on it.

They were just about to take their seats at table when the innkeeper appeared in person. He was a former horse dealer—a large, asthmatic individual, always wheezing, coughing, and clearing his throat. Follenvie was his patronymic.

He asked:

"Mademoiselle Elisabeth Rousset?"

Boule de Suif started, and turned round.

"That is my name."

"Mademoiselle, the Prussian officer wishes to speak to you immediately."

"To me?"

"Yes; if you are Mademoiselle Elisabeth Rousset."

She hesitated, reflected a moment, and then declared roundly:

"That may be; but I'm not going."

They moved restlessly around her; every one wondered and speculated as to the cause of this order. The Count approached:

"You are wrong, Madame, for your refusal may bring trouble not only on yourself, but also on all your companions. It never pays to resist those in authority. Your compliance with this request cannot possibly be fraught with any danger; it has probably been made because some formality or other was forgotten."

All added their voices to that of the Count; Boule de Suif was begged, urged, lectured, and at last convinced; every one was afraid of the complications which might result from headstrong action on her part. She said finally:

"I am doing it for your sakes, remember that!"

The Countess took her hand.

"And we are grateful to you."

She left the room. All waited for her return before commencing the meal. Each was distressed that he or she had not been sent for rather than this impulsive, quick-tempered girl, and each mentally rehearsed platitudes in case of being summoned also.

But at the end of ten minutes she reappeared, breathing hard, crimson with indignation.

"Oh! the scoundrel! the scoundrel!" she stammered.

All were anxious to know what had happened; but she declined to enlighten them, and when the Count pressed the point she silenced him with much dignity, saying:

"No; the matter has nothing to do with you, and I cannot speak of it."

Then they took their places round a high soup tureen, from which issued an odor of cabbage. In spite of this coincidence, the supper was cheerful. The cider was good; the Loiseaus and the nuns drank it from motives of economy. The others ordered wine; Cornudet demanded beer. He had his own fashion of uncorking the bottle and making the beer foam, gazing at it as he inclined his glass and then raised it to a position between the lamp and his eye that he might judge of its color. When he drank, his great beard, which matched the color of his favorite beverage, seemed to tremble with affection; his eyes positively squinted in the endeavor not to lose sight of the beloved glass, and he looked for all the world as if he were fulfilling the only function for which he was born. He seemed to have established in his mind an affinity between the two great passions of his life—pale ale and revolution —and assuredly he could not taste the one without dreaming of the other.

Monsieur and Madame Follenvie dined at the end of the table. The man, wheezing like a broken-down locomotive, was too short-winded to talk when he was eating. But the wife was not silent a moment: she told how the Prussians had impressed her on their arrival, what they did, what they said; execrating them in the first place because they cost her money, and in the second because she had two sons in the army. She addressed herself principally to the Countess, flattered at the opportunity of talking to a lady of quality.

Then she lowered her voice, and began to broach delicate subjects. Her husband interrupted her from time to time, saying:

"You would do well to hold your tongue."

But she took no notice of him, and went on:

"Yes, Madame, these Germans do nothing but eat potatoes and pork, and then pork and potatoes. And don't imagine for a moment that they are clean! No, indeed! And if only you saw them drilling for hours, indeed for days, together; they all collect in a field, then they do nothing but march backward and forward, and wheel this way and that. If only they would cultivate the land, or remain at home and work on their high-roads! Really, Madame, these soldiers are of no earthly use! Poor people have to feed and keep them, only in order that they may learn how to kill! True, I am only an old woman with no education, but when I see them wearing themselves out marching about from morning till night I say to myself: When there are people who make discoveries that are of use to people, why should others take so much trouble to do harm? Really, now, isn't it a terrible thing to kill people, whether they are Prussians, or English, or Poles, or French? If we revenge ourselves on any one who injures us we do wrong, and are punished for it; but when our sons are shot down like partridges that is all right, and decorations are given to the man who kills the most. No, indeed, I shall never be able to understand it."

Cornudet raised his voice:

"War is a barbarous proceeding when we attack a peaceful neighbor, but it is a sacred duty when undertaken in defence of one's country."

The old woman looked down:

"Yes; it's another matter when one acts in self-defence; but would it not be better to kill all the kings, seeing that they make war just to amuse themselves?"

Cornudet's eyes kindled.

"Bravo, citizens!" he said.

Monsieur Carré-Lamadon was reflecting profoundly. Although an ardent admirer of great generals, the peasant woman's sturdy common sense made him reflect on the wealth which might accrue to a country by the employment of so many idle hands now maintained at a great expense, of so much unproductive force, if they were employed in those great industrial enterprises which it will take centuries to complete.

But Loiseau, leaving his seat, went over to the innkeeper and began chatting in a low voice. The big man chuckled, coughed, sputtered; his enormous carcass shook with merriment at the pleasantries of the other; and he ended by buying six casks of claret from Loiseau to be delivered in spring, after the departure of the Prussians.

The moment supper was over every one went to bed, worn out with fatigue.

But Loiseau, who had been making his observations on the sly, sent his wife to bed, and amused himself by placing first his ear, and then his eye, to the bedroom keyhole, in order to discover what he called "the mysteries of the corridor."

At the end of about an hour he heard a rustling, peeped out quickly, and caught sight of Boule de Suif, looking more rotund than ever in a dressing-gown of blue cashmere trimmed with white lace. She held a candle in her hand, and directed her steps to the numbered door at the end of the corridor. But one of the side doors was partly opened, and when, at the end of a few minutes, she returned, Cornudet, in his shirt-sleeves, followed her. They spoke in low tones, then stopped short. Boule de

Suif seemed to be stoutly denying him admission to her room. Unfortunately, Loiseau could not at first hear what they said; but toward the end of the conversation they raised their voices, and he caught a few words. Cornudet was loudly insistent.

"How silly you are! What does it matter to you?" he said.

She seemed indignant, and replied:

"No, my good man, there are times when one does not do that sort of thing; besides, in this place it would be shameful."

Apparently he did not understand, and asked the reason. Then she lost her temper and her caution, and, raising her voice still higher, said:

"Why? Can't you understand why? When there are Prussians in the house! Perhaps even in the very next room!"

He was silent. The patriotic shame of this wanton, who would not suffer herself to be caressed in the neighborhood of the enemy, must have roused his dormant dignity, for after bestowing on her a simple kiss he crept softly back to his room. Loiseau, much edified, capered round the bedroom before taking his place beside his slumbering spouse.

Then silence reigned throughout the house. But soon there arose from some remote part—it might easily have been either cellar or attic—a stertorous, monotonous, regular snoring, a dull, prolonged rumbling, varied by tremors like those of a boiler under pressure of steam. Monsieur Follenvie had gone to sleep.

As they had decided on starting at eight o'clock the next morning, every one was in the kitchen at that hour; but the coach, its roof covered with snow, stood by itself in the middle of the yard, without

either horses or driver. They sought the latter in the stables, coach-houses, and barns—but in vain. So the men of the party resolved to scour the country for him, and sallied forth. They found themselves in the square, with the church at the farther side, and to right and left low-roofed houses where there were some Prussian soldiers. The first soldier they saw was peeling potatoes. The second, farther on, was washing out a barber's shop. Another, bearded to the eyes, was fondling a crying infant, and dandling it on his knees to quiet it; and the stout peasant women, whose men-folk were for the most part at the war, were, by means of signs, telling their obedient conquerors what work they were to do: chop wood, prepare soup, grind coffee; one of them even was doing the washing for his hostess, an infirm old grandmother.

The Count, astonished at what he saw, questioned the beadle, who was coming out of the presbytery. The old man answered:

"Oh, those men are not at all a bad sort; they are not Prussians, I am told; they come from somewhere farther off, I don't exactly know where. And they have all left wives and children behind them; they are not fond of war either, you may be sure! I am sure they are mourning for the men where they come from, just as we do here; and the war causes them just as much unhappiness as it does us. As a matter of fact, things are not so very bad here just now, because the soldiers do no harm, and work just as if they were in their own houses. You see, sir, poor folk always help one another; it is the great ones of this world who make war."

Cornudet, indignant at the friendly understanding established between conquerors and con-

quered, withdrew, preferring to shut himself up in the inn.

"They are repeopling the country," jested Loiseau.

"They are undoing the harm they have done," said Monsieur Carré-Lamadon gravely.

But they could not find the coach driver. At last he was discovered in the village café, fraternizing cordially with the officer's orderly.

"Were you not told to harness the horses at eight o'clock?" demanded the Count.

"Oh, yes; but I've had different orders since."

"What orders?"

"Not to harness at all."

"Who gave you such orders?"

"Why, the Prussian officer."

"But why?"

"I don't know. Go and ask him. I am forbidden to harness the horses, so I don't harness them —that's all."

"Did he tell you so himself?"

"No, sir; the innkeeper gave me the order from him."

"When?"

"Last evening, just as I was going to bed."

The three men returned in a very uneasy frame of mind.

They asked for Monsieur Follenvie, but the servant replied that on account of his asthma he never got up before ten o'clock. They were strictly forbidden to rouse him earlier, except in case of fire.

They wished to see the officer, but that also was impossible, although he lodged in the inn. Monsieur Follenvie alone was authorized to interview him on civil matters. So they waited. The women

returned to their rooms, and occupied themselves with trivial matters.

Cornudet settled down beside the tall kitchen fireplace, before a blazing fire. He had a small table and a jug of beer placed beside him, and he smoked his pipe—a pipe which enjoyed among democrats a consideration almost equal to his own, as though it had served its country in serving Cornudet. It was a fine meerschaum, admirably colored to a black the shade of its owner's teeth, but sweet-smelling, gracefully curved, at home in its master's hand, and completing his physiognomy. And Cornudet sat motionless, his eyes fixed now on the dancing flames, now on the froth which crowned his beer; and after each draught he passed his long, thin fingers with an air of satisfaction through his long, greasy hair, as he sucked the foam from his mustache.

Loiseau, under pretence of stretching his legs, went out to see if he could sell wine to the country dealers. The Count and the manufacturer began to talk politics. They forecast the future of France. One believed in the Orléans dynasty, the other in an unknown savior—a hero who should rise up in the last extremity: a Du Guesclin, perhaps a Joan of Arc? or another Napoleon the First? Ah! if only the Prince Imperial were not so young! Cornudet, listening to them, smiled like a man who holds the keys of destiny in his hands. His pipe perfumed the whole kitchen.

As the clock struck ten, Monsieur Follenvie appeared. He was immediately surrounded and questioned, but could only repeat, three or four times in succession, and without variation, the words:

"The officer said to me, just like this: 'Monsieur Follenvie, you will forbid them to harness up

the coach for those travelers to-morrow. They are not to start without an order from me. You hear? That is sufficient.' "

Then they asked to see the officer. The Count sent him his card, on which Monsieur Carré-Lamadon also inscribed his name and titles. The Prussian sent word that the two men would be admitted to see him after his luncheon—that is to say, about one o'clock.

The ladies reappeared, and they all ate a little, in spite of their anxiety. Boule de Suif appeared ill and very much worried.

They were finishing their coffee when the orderly came to fetch the gentlemen.

Loiseau joined the other two; but when they tried to get Cornudet to accompany them, by way of adding greater solemnity to the occasion, he declared proudly that he would never have anything to do with the Germans, and, resuming his seat in the chimney corner, he called for another jug of beer.

The three men went upstairs, and were ushered into the best room in the inn, where the officer received them lolling at his ease in an armchair, his feet on the mantelpiece, smoking a long porcelain pipe, and enveloped in a gorgeous dressing-gown, doubtless stolen from the deserted dwelling of some citizen destitute of taste in dress. He neither rose, greeted them, nor even glanced in their direction. He afforded a fine example of that insolence of bearing which seems natural to the victorious soldier.

After the lapse of a few moments he said in his halting French:

" What do you want? "

"We wish to start on our journey," said the Count.

"No."

"May I ask the reason of your refusal?"

"Because I don't choose."

"I would respectfully call your attention, Monsieur, to the fact that your general in command gave us a permit to proceed to Dieppe; and I do not think we have done anything to deserve this harshness at your hands."

"I don't choose—that's all. You may go."

They bowed, and retired.

The afternoon was wretched. They could not understand the caprice of this German, and the strangest ideas came into their heads. They all congregated in the kitchen, and talked the subject to death, imagining all kinds of unlikely things. Perhaps they were to be kept as hostages—but for what reason? or to be extradited as prisoners of war? or possibly they were to be held for ransom? They were panic-struck at this last supposition. The richest among them were the most alarmed, seeing themselves forced to empty bags of gold into the insolent soldier's hands in order to buy back their lives. They racked their brains for plausible lies whereby they might conceal the fact that they were rich, and pass themselves off as poor—very poor. Loiseau took off his watch-chain, and put it in his pocket. The approach of night increased their apprehensions. The lamp was lighted, and as it wanted yet two hours to dinner Madame Loiseau proposed a game of *trente et un*. It would distract their thoughts. The rest agreed, and Cornudet himself joined the party, first putting out his pipe for politeness' sake.

The Count shuffled the cards—dealt—and Boule de Suif had thirty-one to start with; soon the interest of the game assuaged the anxiety of the players. But Cornudet noticed that Loiseau and his wife were in league to cheat.

They were about to sit down to dinner when Monsieur Follenvie appeared, and in his grating voice announced:

"The Prussian officer sends to ask Mademoiselle Elisabeth Rousset if she has changed her mind yet."

Boule de Suif stood still, pale as death. Then, suddenly turning crimson with anger, she gasped out:

"Kindly tell that scoundrel, that cur, that carrion of a Prussian, that I will never consent—you understand?—never, never, never!"

The fat innkeeper left the room. Then Boule de Suif was surrounded, questioned, entreated on all sides to reveal the mystery of her visit to the officer. She refused at first; but her wrath soon got the better of her.

"What does he want? He wants to make me his mistress!" she cried.

No one was shocked at the word, so great was the general indignation. Cornudet broke his jug as he banged it down on the table. A loud outcry arose against this base soldier. All were furious. They drew together in common resistance against the foe, as if some part of the sacrifice exacted of Boule de Suif had been demanded of each. The Count declared, with supreme disgust, that those people behaved like ancient barbarians. The women, above all, manifested a lively and tender sympathy for Boule de Suif. The nuns, who appeared only at meals, cast down their eyes, and said nothing.

They dined, however, as soon as the first indignant outburst had subsided; but they spoke little, and thought much.

The ladies went to bed early; and the men, having lighted their pipes, proposed a game of *écarté,* in which Monsieur Follenvie was invited to join, the travelers hoping to question him skilfully as to the best means of vanquishing the officer's obduracy. But he thought of nothing but his cards, would listen to nothing, reply to nothing, and repeated, time after time: "Attend to the game, gentlemen! attend to the game!" So absorbed was his attention that he even forgot to expectorate. The consequence was that his chest gave forth rumbling sounds like those of an organ. His wheezing lungs struck every note of the asthmatic scale, from deep, hollow tones to a shrill, hoarse piping resembling that of a young cock trying to crow.

He refused to go to bed when his wife, overcome with sleep, came to fetch him. So she went off alone, for she was an early bird, always up with the sun; while he was addicted to late hours, ever ready to spend the night with friends. He merely said: "Put my eggnogg by the fire," and went on with the game. When the other men saw that nothing was to be got out of him they declared it was time to retire, and each sought his bed.

They rose fairly early the next morning, with a vague hope of being allowed to start, a greater desire than ever to do so, and a terror at having to spend another day in this wretched little inn.

Alas! the horses remained in the stable, the driver was invisible. They spent their time, for want of something better to do, in wandering round the coach.

Luncheon was a gloomy affair; and there was a general coolness toward Boule de Suif, for night, which brings counsel, had somewhat modified the judgment of her companions. In the cold light of the morning they almost bore a grudge against the girl for not having secretly sought out the Prussian, that the rest of the party might receive a joyful surprise when they awoke. What more simple? Besides, who would have been the wiser? She might have saved appearances by telling the officer that she had taken pity on their distress. Such a step would be of so little consequence to her!

But no one as yet confessed to such thoughts.

In the afternoon, seeing that they were all bored to death, the Count proposed a walk in the neighborhood of the village. Each one wrapped himself up well, and the little party set out, leaving behind only Cornudet, who preferred to sit over the fire, and the two nuns, who were in the habit of spending their day in the church or at the presbytery.

The cold, which grew more intense each day, almost froze the noses and ears of the pedestrians, their feet began to pain them so that each step was a penance, and when they reached the open country it looked so mournful and depressing in its limitless mantle of white that they all hastily retraced their steps, with bodies benumbed and hearts heavy.

The four women walked in front, and the three men followed a little in their rear.

Loiseau, who saw perfectly well how matters stood, asked suddenly "if that trollop were going to keep them waiting much longer in this God-forsaken spot." The Count, always courteous, replied that they could not exact so painful a sacrifice from any woman, and that the first move must come from

herself. Monsieur Carré-Lamadon remarked that if the French, as they talked of doing, made a counter attack by way of Dieppe, their encounter with the enemy must inevitably take place at Tôtes. This reflection made the other two anxious.

"Supposing we escape on foot?" said Loiseau.

The Count shrugged his shoulders.

"How can you think of such a thing, in this snow? And with our wives? Besides, we should be pursued at once, overtaken in ten minutes, and brought back as prisoners at the mercy of the soldiery."

This was true enough; they were silent.

The ladies talked of dress, but a certain constraint seemed to prevail among them.

Suddenly, at the end of the street, the officer appeared. His tall, wasplike, uniformed figure was outlined against the snow which bounded the horizon, and he walked, knees apart, with that motion peculiar to soldiers, who are always anxious not to soil their carefully polished boots.

He bowed as he passed the ladies, then glanced scornfully at the men, who had sufficient dignity not to raise their hats, though Loiseau made a movement to do so.

Boule de Suif flushed crimson to the ears, and the three married women felt unutterably humiliated at being met thus by the soldier in company with the girl whom he had treated with such scant ceremony.

Then they began to talk about him, his figure, and his face. Madame Carré-Lamadon, who had known many officers and judged them as a connoisseur, thought him not at all bad-looking; she even regretted that he was not a Frenchman, because in

that case he would have made a very handsome hussar, with whom all the women would assuredly have fallen in love.

When they were once more within doors they did not know what to do with themselves. Sharp words even were exchanged apropos of the merest trifles. The silent dinner was quickly over, and each one went to bed early in the hope of sleeping, and thus killing time.

They came down next morning with tired faces and irritable tempers; the women scarcely spoke to Boule de Suif.

A church bell summoned the faithful to a baptism. Boule de Suif had a child being brought up by peasants at Yvetot. She did not see him once a year, and never thought of him; but the idea of the child who was about to be baptized induced a sudden wave of tenderness for her own, and she insisted on being present at the ceremony.

As soon as she had gone out, the rest of the company looked at one another and then drew their chairs together; for they realized that they must decide on some course of action. Loiseau had an inspiration: he proposed that they should ask the officer to detain Boule de Suif only, and to let the rest depart on their way.

Monsieur Follenvie was intrusted with this commission, but he returned to them almost immediately. The German, who knew human nature, had shown him the door. He intended to keep all the travelers until his condition had been complied with.

Whereupon Madame Loiseau's vulgar temperament broke bounds.

"We're not going to die of old age here!" she cried. "Since it's that vixen's trade to behave so

with men I don't see that she has any right to refuse one more than another. I may as well tell you she took any lovers she could get at Rouen—even coachmen! Yes, indeed, Madame—the coachman at the prefecture! I know it for a fact, for he buys his wine of us. And now that it is a question of getting us out of a difficulty she puts on virtuous airs, the drab! For my part, I think this officer has behaved very well. Why, there were three others of us, any one of whom he would undoubtedly have preferred. But no, he contents himself with the girl who is common property. He respects married women. Just think. He is master here. He had only to say: 'I wish it!' and he might have taken us by force, with the help of his soldiers."

The two other women shuddered; the eyes of pretty Madame Carré-Lamadon glistened, and she grew pale, as if the officer were indeed in the act of laying violent hands on her.

The men, who had been discussing the subject among themselves, drew near. Loiseau, in a state of furious resentment, was for delivering up "that miserable woman," bound hand and foot, into the enemy's power. But the Count, descended from three generations of ambassadors, and endowed, moreover, with the lineaments of a diplomat, was in favor of more tactful measures.

"We must persuade her," he said.

Then they laid their plans.

The women drew together; they lowered their voices, and the discussion became general, each giving his or her opinion. But the conversation was not in the least coarse. The ladies, in particular, were adepts at delicate phrases and charming subtleties of expression to describe the most improper

things. A stranger would have understood none of their allusions, so guarded was the language they employed. But, seeing that the thin veneer of modesty with which every woman of the world is furnished, goes but a very little way below the surface, they began rather to enjoy this unedifying episode, and at bottom were hugely delighted—feeling themselves in their element, furthering the schemes of lawless love with the gusto of a gourmand cook who prepares supper for another.

Their gayety returned of itself, so amusing at last did the whole business seem to them. The Count uttered several rather risky witticisms, but so tactfully were they said that his audience could not help smiling. Loiseau in turn made some considerably broader jokes, but no one took offence; and the thought expressed with such brutal directness by his wife was uppermost in the minds of all: "Since it's the girl's trade, why should she refuse this man more than another?" Dainty Madame Carré-Lamadon seemed to think even that in Boule de Suif's place she would be less inclined to refuse him than another.

The blockade was as carefully arranged as if they were investing a fortress. Each agreed on the rôle which he or she was to play, the arguments to be used, the maneuvers to be executed. They decided on the plan of campaign, the stratagems they were to employ, and the surprise attacks which were to reduce this human citadel and force it to receive the enemy within its walls.

But Cornudet remained apart from the rest, taking no share in the plot.

So absorbed was the attention of all that Boule de Suif's entrance was almost unnoticed. But the

Count whispered a gentle "Hush!" which made the others look up. She was there. They suddenly stopped talking, and a vague embarrassment prevented them for a few moments from addressing her. But the Countess, more practiced than the others in the wiles of the drawing-room, asked her:

"Was the baptism interesting?"

The girl, still under the stress of emotion, told what she had seen and heard, described the faces, the attitudes of those present, and even the appearance of the church. She concluded with the words:

"It does one good to pray sometimes."

Until lunch time the ladies contented themselves with being pleasant to her, so as to increase her confidence and make her amenable to their advice.

As soon as they took their seats at table the attack began. First they opened a vague conversation on the subject of self-sacrifice. Ancient examples were quoted: Judith and Holofernes; then, irrationally enough, Lucrece and Sextus; Cleopatra and the hostile generals whom she reduced to abject slavery by a surrender of her charms. Next was recounted an extraordinary story, born of the imagination of these ignorant millionaires, which told how the matrons of Rome seduced Hannibal, his lieutenants, and all his mercenaries at Capua. They held up to admiration all those women who from time to time have arrested the victorious progress of conquerors, made of their bodies a field of battle, a means of ruling, a weapon; who have vanquished by their heroic caresses hideous or detested beings, and sacrificed their chastity to vengeance and devotion.

All was said with due restraint and regard for propriety, the effect heightened now and then by an

outburst of forced enthusiasm calculated to excite emulation.

A listener would have thought at last that the one rôle of woman on earth was a perpetual sacrifice of her person, a continual abandonment of herself to the caprices of a hostile soldiery.

The two nuns seemed to hear nothing, and to be lost in thought. Boule de Suif also was silent.

During the whole afternoon she was left to her reflections. But instead of calling her " Madame " as they had done hitherto, her companions addressed her simply as " Mademoiselle," without exactly knowing why, but as if desirous of making her descend a step in the esteem she had won, and forcing her to realize her degraded position.

Just as soup was served, Monsieur Follenvie reappeared, repeating his phrase of the evening before:

" The Prussian officer sends to ask if Mademoiselle Elisabeth Rousset has changed her mind."

Boule de Suif answered briefly:

" No, Monsieur."

But at dinner the coalition weakened. Loiseau made three unfortunate remarks. Each was cudgeling his brains for further examples of self-sacrifice, and could find none, when the Countess, possibly without ulterior motive, and moved simply by a vague desire to do homage to religion, began to question the elder of the two nuns on the most striking facts in the lives of the saints. Now, it fell out that many of these had committed acts which would be crimes in our eyes, but the Church readily pardons such deeds when they are accomplished for the glory of God or the good of mankind. This was a powerful argument, and the Countess made the most

of it. Then, whether by reason of a tacit understanding, a thinly veiled act of complaisance such as those who wear the ecclesiastical habit excel in, or whether merely as the result of sheer stupidity —a stupidity admirably adapted to further their designs—the old nun rendered formidable aid to the conspirators. They had thought her timid; she proved herself bold, talkative, bigoted. She was not troubled by the ins and outs of casuistry; her doctrines were as iron bars; her faith knew no doubt; her conscience no scruples. She looked on Abraham's sacrifice as natural enough, for she herself would not have hesitated to kill both father and mother if she had received a divine order to that effect; and nothing, in her opinion, could displease our Lord, provided the motive were praiseworthy. The Countess, putting to good use the consecrated authority of her unexpected ally, led her on to make a lengthy and edifying paraphrase of that axiom enunciated by a certain school of moralists: "The end justifies the means."

"Then, sister," she asked, "you think God accepts all methods, and pardons the act when the motive is pure?"

"Undoubtedly, Madame. An action reprehensible in itself often derives merit from the thought which inspires it."

And in this wise they talked on, fathoming the wishes of God, predicting His judgments, describing Him as interested in matters which assuredly concern Him but little.

All was said with the utmost care and discretion, but every word uttered by the holy woman in her nun's garb weakened the indignant resistance of the courtesan. Then the conversation drifted some-

what, and the nun began to talk of the convents of her order, of her Superior, of herself, and of her fragile little neighbor, Sister St. Nicéphore. They had been sent for from Havre to nurse the hundreds of soldiers who were in hospitals, stricken with smallpox. She described these wretched invalids and their malady. And, while they themselves were detained on their way by the caprices of the Prussian officer, scores of Frenchmen might be dying, whom they would otherwise have saved! For the nursing of soldiers was the old nun's specialty; she had been in the Crimea, in Italy, in Austria; and as she told the story of her campaigns she revealed herself as one of those holy sisters of the fife and drum who seem designed by nature to follow camps, to snatch the wounded from amid the strife of battle, and to quell with a word, more effectually than any general, the rough and insubordinate troopers —a masterful woman, her seamed and pitted face itself an image of the devastations of war.

No one spoke when she had finished for fear of spoiling the excellent effect of her words.

As soon as the meal was over the travelers retired to their rooms, whence they emerged the following day at a late hour of the morning.

Luncheon passed off quietly. The seed sown the preceding evening was being given time to germinate and bring forth fruit.

In the afternoon the Countess proposed a walk; then the Count, as had been arranged beforehand, took Boule de Suif's arm, and walked with her at some distance behind the rest.

He began talking to her in that familiar, paternal, slightly contemptuous tone which men of his class adopt in speaking to women like her, calling

her "my dear child," and talking down to her from the height of his exalted social position and stainless reputation. He came straight to the point:

"So you prefer to leave us here, exposed like yourself to all the violence which would follow on a repulse of the Prussian troops, rather than consent to surrender yourself, as you have done so many times in your life?"

The girl did not reply.

He tried kindness, argument, sentiment. He still bore himself as Count, even while adopting, when desirable, an attitude of gallantry, and making pretty—nay, even tender—speeches. He exalted the service she would render them, spoke of their gratitude; then, suddenly, using the familiar "thou":

"And you know, my dear, he could boast then of having made a conquest of a pretty girl such as he won't often find in his own country."

Boule de Suif did not answer, and joined the rest of the party.

As soon as they returned she went to her room, and was seen no more. The general anxiety was at its height. What would she do? If she still resisted, how awkward for them all!

The dinner hour struck; they waited for her in vain. At last Monsieur Follenvie entered, announcing that Mademoiselle Rousset was not well, and that they might sit down to table. They all pricked up their ears. The Count drew near the innkeeper, and whispered:

"Is it all right?"

"Yes."

Out of regard for propriety he said nothing to his companions, but merely nodded slightly toward

them. A great sigh of relief went up from all breasts; every face was lighted up with joy.

"By Gad!" shouted Loiseau, "I'll stand champagne all round if there's any to be found in this place." And great was Madame Loiseau's dismay when the proprietor came back with four bottles in his hands. They had all suddenly become talkative and merry; a lively joy filled all hearts. The Count seemed to perceive for the first time that Madame Carré-Lamadon was charming; the manufacturer paid compliments to the Countess. The conversation was animated, sprightly, witty, and, although many of the jokes were in the worst possible taste, all the company were amused by them, and none offended—indignation being dependent, like other emotions, on surroundings. And the mental atmosphere had gradually become filled with gross imaginings and unclean thoughts.

At dessert even the women indulged in discreetly worded allusions. Their glances were full of meaning; they had drunk much. The Count, who even in his moments of relaxation preserved a dignified demeanor, hit on a much-appreciated comparison of the condition of things with the termination of a winter spent in the icy solitude of the North Pole and the joy of shipwrecked mariners who at last perceive a southward track opening out before their eyes.

Loiseau, fairly in his element, rose to his feet, holding aloft a glass of champagne.

"I drink to our deliverance!" he shouted.

All stood up, and greeted the toast with acclamation. Even the two good sisters yielded to the solicitations of the ladies, and consented to moisten their lips with the foaming wine, which they had never

before tasted. They declared it was like effervescent lemonade, but with a pleasanter flavor.

"It is a pity," said Loiseau, "that we have no piano; we might have had a quadrille."

Cornudet had not spoken a word or made a movement; he seemed plunged in serious thought, and now and then tugged furiously at his great beard, as if trying to add still further to its length. At last, toward midnight, when they were about to separate, Loiseau, whose gait was far from steady, suddenly slapped him on the back, saying thickly:

"You're not jolly to-night; why are you so silent, old man?"

Cornudet threw back his head, cast one swift and scornful glance over the assemblage, and answered:

"I tell you all, you have done an infamous thing!"

He rose, reached the door, and repeating: "Infamous!" disappeared.

A chill fell on all. Loiseau himself looked foolish and disconcerted for a moment, but soon recovered his *aplomb,* and, writhing with laughter, exclaimed:

"Really, you're all too green for anything!"

Pressed for an explanation, he related the "mysteries of the corridor," whereat his listeners were hugely amused. The ladies could hardly contain their delight. The Count and Monsieur Carré-Lamadon laughed till they cried. They could scarcely believe their ears.

"What! you are sure? He wanted——"

"I tell you I saw it with my own eyes."

"And she refused?"

"Because the Prussian was in the next room!"

"Surely you are mistaken?"

"I swear I'm telling you the truth."

The Count was choking with laughter. The manufacturer held his sides. Loiseau continued:

"So you may well imagine he doesn't think this evening's business at all amusing."

And all three began to laugh again, choking, coughing, almost ill with merriment.

Then they separated. But Madame Loiseau, who was nothing if not spiteful, remarked to her husband as they were on the way to bed that "that stuck-up little minx of a Carré-Lamadon had laughed on the wrong side of her mouth all the evening."

"You know," she said, "when women run after uniforms it's all the same to them whether the men who wear them are French or Prussian. It's perfectly sickening!"

The next morning the snow showed dazzling white under a clear winter sun. The coach, ready at last, waited before the door; while a flock of white pigeons, with pink eyes spotted in the centers with black, puffed out their white feathers and walked sedately between the legs of the six horses, picking at the steaming manure.

The driver, wrapped in his sheepskin coat, was smoking a pipe on the box, and all the passengers, radiant with delight at their approaching departure, were putting up provisions for the remainder of the journey.

They were waiting only for Boule de Suif. At last she appeared.

She seemed rather shamefaced and embarrassed, and advanced with timid step toward her companions, who with one accord turned aside as if they had not seen her. The Count, with much dignity,

took his wife by the arm, and removed her from the unclean contact.

The girl stood still, stupefied with astonishment; then, plucking up courage, accosted the manufacturer's wife with a humble "Good morning, Madame," to which the other replied merely with a slight and insolent nod, accompanied by a look of outraged virtue. Every one suddenly appeared extremely busy, and kept as far from Boule de Suif as if her skirts had been infected with some deadly disease. Then they hurried to the coach, followed by the despised courtesan, who, arriving last of all, silently took the place she had occupied during the first part of the journey.

The rest seemed neither to see nor to know her —all save Madame Loiseau, who, glancing contemptuously in her direction, remarked, half aloud, to her husband:

"What a mercy I am not sitting beside that creature!"

The lumbering vehicle started on its way, and the journey began afresh.

At first no one spoke. Boule de Suif dared not even raise her eyes. She felt at once indignant with her neighbors, and humiliated at having yielded to the Prussian into whose arms they had so hypocritically cast her.

But the Countess, turning toward Madame Carré-Lamadon, soon broke the painful silence:

"I think you know Madame d'Étrelles?"

"Yes; she is a friend of mine."

"Such a charming woman!"

"Delightful! Exceptionally talented, and an artist to the finger tips. She sings marvelously and draws to perfection."

The manufacturer was chatting with the Count, and amid the clatter of the window-panes a word of their conversation was now and then distinguishable: "Shares—maturity—premium—time-limit."

Loiseau, who had abstracted from the inn the timeworn pack of cards, thick with the grease of five years' contact with half-wiped-off tables, started a game of bézique with his wife.

The good sisters, taking up simultaneously the long rosaries hanging from their waists, made the sign of the cross, and began to mutter in unison interminable prayers, their lips moving ever more and more swiftly, as if they sought which should outdistance the other in the race of orisons; from time to time they kissed a medal, and crossed themselves anew, then resumed their rapid and unintelligible murmur.

Cornudet sat still, lost in thought.

At the end of three hours Loiseau gathered up the cards, and remarked that he was hungry.

His wife thereupon produced a parcel tied with string, from which she extracted a piece of cold veal. This she cut into neat, thin slices, and both began to eat.

"We may as well do the same," said the Countess. The rest agreed, and she unpacked the provisions which had been prepared for herself, the Count, and the Carré-Lamadons. In one of those oval dishes, the lids of which are decorated with an earthenware hare, by way of showing that a game pie lies within, was a succulent delicacy consisting of the brown flesh of the game, larded with streaks of bacon and flavored with other meats chopped fine. A solid wedge of Gruyère cheese, which had been wrapped in a newspaper, bore the imprint:

"Items of News," on its rich, oily surface.

The two good sisters brought to light a hunk of sausage smelling strongly of garlic; and Cornudet, plunging both hands at once into the capacious pockets of his loose overcoat, produced from one four hard-boiled eggs and from the other a crust of bread. He removed the shells, threw them into the straw beneath his feet, and began to devour the eggs, letting morsels of the bright yellow yolk fall on his mighty beard, where they looked like stars.

Boule de Suif, in the haste and confusion of her departure, had not thought of anything, and, stifling with rage, she watched all these people placidly eating. At first, ill-suppressed wrath shook her whole person, and she opened her lips to shriek the truth at them, to overwhelm them with a volley of insults; but she could not utter a word, so choked was she with indignation.

No one looked at her, no one thought of her. She felt herself swallowed up in the scorn of these virtuous creatures, who had first sacrificed, then rejected her as a thing useless and unclean. Then she remembered her big basket full of the good things they had so greedily devoured: the two chickens coated in jelly, the pies, the pears, the four bottles of claret; and her fury broke forth like a cord that is overstrained, and she was on the verge of tears. She made terrible efforts at self-control, drew herself up, swallowed the sobs which choked her; but the tears rose nevertheless, shone at the brink of her eyelids, and soon two heavy drops coursed slowly down her cheeks. Others followed more quickly, like water filtering from a rock, and fell, one after another, on her rounded bosom. She sat upright, with a fixed expression, her face pale and

rigid, hoping desperately that no one saw her give way.

But the Countess noticed that she was weeping, and with a sign drew her husband's attention to the fact. He shrugged his shoulders, as if to say: "Well, what of it? It's not my fault." Madame Loiseau chuckled triumphantly, and murmured:

"She's weeping for shame."

The two nuns had betaken themselves once more to their prayers, first wrapping the remainder of their sausage in paper.

Then Cornudet, who was digesting his eggs, stretched his long legs under the opposite seat, threw himself back, folded his arms, smiled like a man who has just thought of a good joke, and began to whistle the *Marseillaise*.

The faces of his neighbors clouded; the popular air evidently did not find favor with them; they grew nervous and irritable, and seemed ready to howl as a dog does at the sound of a barrel-organ. Cornudet saw the discomfort he was creating, and whistled the louder; sometimes he even hummed the words:

Amour sacré de la patrie,
Conduis, soutiens, nos bras vengeurs,
Liberté, liberté cherie,
Combats avec tes defenseurs!

The coach progressed more swiftly, the snow being harder now; and all the way to Dieppe, during the long, dreary hours of the journey, first in the gathering dusk, then in the thick darkness, raising his voice above the rumbling of the vehicle, Cornudet continued with fierce obstinacy his vengeful and monotonous whistling, forcing his weary

and exasperated hearers to follow the song from end to end, to recall every word of every line, as each was repeated over and over again with untiring persistence.

And Boule de Suif still wept, and sometimes a sob she could not restrain was heard in the darkness between two verses of the song.

WIFE AND MISTRESS

IT was not alone her long, silky curls, which covered her small, fairy-like head like a golden halo, nor her beautiful complexion, nor her mouth, which was like some delicate shell; nor was it her supreme innocence, shown by her sudden blushes and her somewhat awkward movements, nor was it her ingenuous questions, which had besieged and conquered Georges d'Hardermes' heart. He had a peculiar disposition, and any suspicion of a bond frightened him and put him to flight immediately. His unstable heart was ready to yield to any temptation, was incapable of any lasting attachment, and a succession of women had left no more impression on it than on the sea-sands which are constantly being swept by the rising waves.

His was not the dream of a life of affection, of

peace, the need of loving and of being loved, which a fast man so often feels between thirty and forty. His insurmountable weariness of that circle of pleasure in which he had moved, like a horse in a circus, the voids in his existence caused by the marriage of his bachelor friends, which in his selfishness he looked upon as desertion, although he envied them, had at last induced him to listen to the prayers and advice of his old mother, and to marry Mademoiselle Suzanne de Gouvres. But the vision that he had had when he saw her playing with little children, covering them with kisses, and looking at them with ecstasy in her limpid eyes, and in hearing her talk of the pleasures and the anguish that those must feel who are mothers in the fullest sense of the word, was the vision of a happy home, where a man feels that he is living again in others, of that home which is full of laughter and of song, and seems as if it were full of birds.

As a matter of fact, he loved children as some men love animals, and he was interested in them as in some delightful spectacle; they attracted him.

He was very gentle, kind, and thoughtful with them, invented games for them, took them on his knees, was never tired of listening to their chatter, or of watching the development of their instincts, of their intellect, and of their little, delicate souls.

He used to go and sit in the Parc Monceau, and in the squares, to watch them playing and romping and prattling round him, and one day, as a joke, somebody, a jealous sweetheart, or some friends, had sent him a splendid wet-nurse's cap, with long pink ribbons.

At first, he was under the influence of the charm that springs from the beginning of an intimacy,

from the first kisses, and devoted himself altogether to that amorous education which revealed a new life to him, as it were, and enchanted him.

He thought of nothing except of increasing the ardent love that his wife bestowed on him, and lived in a state of perpetual adoration. Suzanne's feelings, the metamorphosis of that virginal heart, which was beginning to glow with love, and which vibrated her passion, her modesty, her sensations, were all delicious surprises to him.

He felt that feverish pleasure of a traveler who has discovered some marvelous Eden and loses his head over it, and, at times, with a long affectionate and proud look at her, which grew even warmer on looking into Suzanne's limpid blue eyes, he would put his arms round her waist, and pressing her to him so strongly that it hurt the young woman, he would exclaim:

"Oh! I am quite sure that nowhere on earth are there two people who love each other as we do, and who are as happy as you and I are, my darling!"

Months of uninterrupted possession and enchantment succeeded each other without Georges altering, and without any lassitude mingling with the ardor of their love, or the fire of their affection dying out.

Then, however, suddenly he ceased to be happy, and, in spite of all his efforts to hide his invincible lowness of spirits, he became another man, restless, being irritated at nothing, morose, and bored at everything and everywhere; whimsical, and never knowing what he wanted.

There was certainly something that was now poisoning that affection which had formerly been

his delight, which was coming more and more between him and his wife every day, and which was giving him a distaste for home.

By degrees, that vague suffering assumed a definite shape in his heart, got implanted and fixed there, like a nail. He had not attained his object, and he felt the weight of chains, understood that he could never get used to such an existence, that he could not love a woman who seemed incapable of becoming a mother, who lowered herself to the part of a lawful mistress, and who perhaps would not be faithful to him.

Alas! To awake from such a dream, to say to himself that he was reduced to envying the good fortune of others, that he should never cover a little, curly, smiling head with kisses, where some striking likeness, some undecided gleams of growing intellect fill a man with joy, but that he would be obliged to take the remainder of his journey in solitude, heartbroken, with nothing but old age around him; that no branch would again spring from the family tree, and that on his death-bed he should not have that last consolation of pressing his dear ones, for whom he struggled and made so many sacrifices, in his failing arms, and who were sobbing with grief, but that soon he should be the prey of indifferent and greedy heirs, who were discounting his approaching death like some valuable security!

Georges had not told Suzanne the feelings which were tormenting him, and took care that she should not see his state of unhappiness, and he did not worry her with trying questions, that only end in some violent and distressing scene.

But she was too much of a woman, and she loved

her husband too much, not to guess what was making him so gloomy and was imperiling their love.

And every month there came a fresh disappointment, and hope was again deferred. She, however, persisted in believing that their wish would be granted, and grew ill with this painful waiting, and refused to believe that she should never be a mother.

She would have looked upon it as a humiliation either to consult a medical man, or to make a pilgrimage to some shrine, as so many women did, in their despair, and her proud, loyal, and loving nature at last rebelled against that hostility, which showed itself in the angry outbursts, the painful silence, and the haughty coldness of the man who could, however, have done anything he liked with her by a little kindness.

With death in her soul, she had a presentiment of the way of the cross which is an end of love, of all the bitterness which sooner or later would end in terrible quarrels and in words which would put an impassable barrier between them.

At last, one evening, when George d'Hardermes had lost his temper, had wounded her by equivocal words and bad jokes, Suzanne, who was very pale, and who was clutching the arms of her easy-chair convulsively, interrupted him with the accents of farewell in her melancholy voice:

"As you do not love me any more, why not say so at once, instead of wounding me like this by small, traitorous blows, and, above all, why continue to live together? . . . You want your liberty, and I will give it you; you have your fortune, and I have mine. Let us separate without a scandal and without a lawsuit, so that, at least, a little friend-

ship may survive our love . . . I shall leave Paris and go and live in the country with my mother . . . God is my witness, however, that I still love you, my poor Georges, as much as ever, and that I shall remain your wife, whether I am with you or separated from you!"

Georges hesitated for a few moments before replying, with an uneasy, sad look on his face, and then said, turning away his head:

"Yes, perhaps it will be best for both of us!"

They voluntarily broke their marriage contract, as she had heroically volunteered to do. She kept her resolution, exiled herself, buried herself in obscurity, accepted the trial with calm fortitude, and was as resigned as only faithful and devoted souls can be.

They wrote to each other, and she deluded herself, pursued the chimera that Georges would return to her, would call her back to his side, would escape from his former associates, would understand of what deep love he had voluntarily deprived himself, and would love her again as he had formerly loved her; and she resisted all the entreaties and the advice of her friends to cut such a false position short, and to institute a suit for divorce against her husband, as the issue would be certain.

He, at the end of a few months of solitude, of evanescent love affairs, when to beguile his loneliness a man passes from the arms of one woman to those of another, had set up a new home, and had tied himself to a woman whom he had accidentally met at a party of friends, and who had managed to please him and to amuse him.

His deserted wife was naturally not left in ig-

norance of the fact, and, stifling her jealousy and her grief, she put on a smile, and thought that it would be the same with this one as it had been with all his other ephemeral mistresses, whom her husband had successively got rid of.

Was not that, after all, the best thing to bring about the issue which she longed and hoped for? Would not that doubtful passion, that close intimacy, certainly make Monsieur d'Hardermes compare the woman he possessed with the woman he had formerly had, and cause him to invoke that lost paradise and that heart full of forgiveness, of love and of goodness which had not forgotten him, but which would respond to his first appeal?

And that confidence of hers in a happier future, which neither all the proofs of that connection in which Monsieur d'Hardermes was becoming more and more involved, and which her friends so kindly furnished her with, nor the disdainful silence with which he treated all her gentle, indulgent letters could shake, had something touching, angelic in it, and reminded those who knew her well of certain passages in the *Lives of the Saints*.

At length, however, the sympathy of those who had so often tried to save the young woman, to cure her, and to open her eyes, became exhausted, and, left to herself, Suzanne proudly continued her dream, and absorbed herself in it.

Two interminable years had passed since she had lived with Monsieur d'Hardermes, and since he had put that hateful mistress in her place. She had lost all trace of them, knew nothing about him, and, in spite of everything, did not despair of seeing him again, and regaining her hold over him, who could tell when, or by what miracle, but surely

before those eyes which he had so loved were tired of shedding tears, and her fair hair, which he had so often covered with kisses, had grown white.

And the arrival of the postman every morning and evening made her start and shiver with nervousness.

One day, however, when she was going to Paris, Madame d'Hardermes found herself alone in the ladies' carriage, into which she had got in a hurry, with a peasant woman in her Sunday best, who had a child with pretty pink cheeks and rosy lips, and which was like the dimpled cherubs that one sees in pictures of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, on her lap.

The nurse said affectionate words to the child in a coaxing voice, wrapped it up in the folds of her large cloak, sometimes gave it a noisy, hearty kiss, and it beat the air with little hands, and crowed and laughed with such pretty, attractive, babyish movements that Suzanne could not help exclaiming:

"Oh! the pretty little thing!" and taking it into her arms.

At first the child was surprised at the strange face, and for a moment seemed as if it were going to cry; but it became reassured immediately, smiled at the stranger who looked at it so kindly, inhaled the delicate scent of the iris in the bodice of her dress, with dilated nostrils, and cuddled up against her.

The two women began to talk, and, without knowing why, Madame d'Hardermes questioned the nurse, asked her where she came from, and where she was taking the little thing.

The other, rather flattered that Suzanne ad-

mired the child and took an interest in it, replied, somewhat vaingloriously, that she lived at Bois-le-Roy, and that her husband was a wagoner.

The child had been intrusted to their care by some people in Paris, who appeared very happy and extremely well off. And the nurse added in a drawling voice:

"Perhaps, Madame, you know my master and mistress, Monsieur and Madame d'Hardermes?"

Suzanne started with surprise and grief, and grew as pale as if all her blood were streaming from some wound, and thinking that she had not heard correctly, with a fixed look and trembling lips, she said, slowly, as if every word hurt her throat:

"You said, Monsieur and Madame d'Hardermes?"

"Yes; do you know them?"

"I, yes . . . formerly . . . but it is a long time ago."

She could scarcely speak, and was as pale as death; she hardly knew what she was saying, with her eyes on this pretty child, which Georges must be so fond of.

She saw him, as if in a window which had suddenly been lifted up, where everything had been dark before, with their arms round each other, and radiant with happiness, with that fair head, that divine dawn, the living, smiling proof of their love, between them.

They would never leave each other; they were already almost as good as married, and were robbing her of the name which she had defended and guarded as a sacred deposit.

She would never succeed in breaking such bonds.

It was a shipwreck where nothing could survive, and where the waves did not even drift some shapeless waif and stray ashore.

And great tears rolled down her cheeks, one by one, and wetted her veil.

The train stopped at the station, and the nurse scarcely liked to ask Suzanne for the child, who was holding it against her heaving bosom, and kissing it as if she intended to smother it, and she said:

"I suppose the baby reminds you of one you have lost, my poor, dear lady, but the loss can be repaired at your age, surely; a second is as good as a first, and if one does not do one's self justice . . ."

Madame d'Hardermes gave her back the child, and hurried out straight ahead of her, like a hunted animal, and threw herself into the first cab that she saw. . . .

She sued for a divorce, and obtained it.

SIMON'S PAPA

NOON had just struck. The school door opened and the youngsters darted out, jostling each other in their haste to get out quickly. But instead of promptly dispersing and going home to dinner as usual, they stopped a few paces off, broke up into knots, and began whispering.

The fact was that that morning Simon, the son of La Blanchotte, had, for the first time, attended school.

They had all of them in their families heard talk of La Blanchotte; and, although in public she was welcome enough, the mothers among themselves treated her with a somewhat disdainful compassion, which the children had imitated without in the least knowing why.

As for Simon himself, they did not know him, for he never went out, and did not run about with them in the streets of the village, or along the banks of the river. And they did not care for him; so it was with a certain delight, mingled with

considerable astonishment, that they met and repeated to each other what had been said by a lad of fourteen or fifteen who appeared to know all about it, so sagaciously did he wink. "You know . . . Simon . . . well, he has no papa."

Just then La Blanchotte's son appeared in the doorway of the school.

He was seven or eight years old, rather pale, very neat, with a timid and almost awkward manner.

He was starting home to his mother's house when the groups of his schoolmates, whispering and watching him with the mischievous and heartless eyes of children bent upon playing a nasty trick, gradually closed in around him and ended by surrounding him altogether. There he stood in their midst, surprised and embarrassed, not understanding what they were going to do with him. But the lad who had brought the news, puffed up with the success he had met with already, demanded:

"What is your name, you?"

He answered: "Simon."

"Simon what?" retorted the other.

The child, altogether bewildered, repeated: "Simon."

The lad shouted at him: "One is named Simon something . . . that is not a name . . . Simon, indeed!"

The child, on the brink of tears, replied for the third time:

"My name is Simon."

The urchins began to laugh. The triumphant tormentor cried: "You can see plainly that he has no papa."

A deep silence ensued. The children were dum-

founded by this extraordinary, impossible, monstrous thing—a boy who had not a papa; they looked upon him as a phenomenon, an unnatural being, and they felt that hitherto inexplicable contempt of their mothers for La Blanchotte growing upon them. As for Simon, he had leaned against a tree to avoid falling, and he remained as if prostrated by an irreparable disaster. He sought to explain, but could think of nothing to say to refute this horrible charge that he had no papa. At last he shouted at them quite recklessly: "Yes, I have one."

"Where is he?" demanded the boy.

Simon was silent, he did not know. The children roared, tremendously excited; and those country boys, little more than animals, experienced that cruel craving which prompts the fowls of a farmyard to destroy one among themselves as soon as it is wounded. Simon suddenly espied a little neighbor, the son of a widow, whom he had seen, as he himself was to be seen, always alone with his mother.

"And no more have you," he said; "no more have you a papa."

"Yes," replied the other, "I have one."

"Where is he?" rejoined Simon.

"He is dead," declared the brat with superb dignity; "he is in the cemetery, is my papa."

A murmur of approval rose among the little wretches, as if this fact of possessing a papa dead in a cemetery had caused their comrade to grow big enough to crush the other one who had no papa at all. And these boys, whose fathers were for the most part bad men, drunkards, thieves, and who beat their wives, jostled each other to press closer

and closer, as though they, the legitimate ones, would smother by their pressure one who was illegitimate.

The boy who chanced to be next Simon suddenly put his tongue out at him with a mocking air and shouted at him:

"No papa! No papa!"

Simon seized him by the hair with both hands and set to work to disable his legs with kicks, while he bit his cheek ferociously. A tremendous struggle ensued between the two combatants, and Simon found himself beaten, torn, bruised, rolled on the ground in the midst of the ring of applauding schoolboys. As he arose, mechanically brushing with his hand his little blouse all covered with dust, some one shouted at him:

"Go and tell your papa."

Then he felt a great sinking at his heart. They were stronger than he was, they had beaten him, and he had no answer to give them, for he knew well that it was true that he had no papa. Full of pride, he attempted for some moments to struggle against the tears which were choking him. He had a feeling of suffocation, and then without any sound he commenced to weep, with great shaking sobs. A ferocious joy broke out among his enemies, and, with one accord, just like savages in their fearful festivals, they took each other by the hand and danced round him in a circle, repeating as a refrain:

"No papa! No papa!"

But suddenly Simon ceased sobbing. He became furious. There were stones under his feet; he picked them up and with all his strength hurled them at his tormentors. Two or three were struck

and rushed off yelling, and so formidable did he appear that the rest became panic-stricken. Cowards, as the mob always is in presence of an exasperated man, they broke up and fled. Left alone, the little fellow without a father set off running toward the fields, for a recollection had been awakened in him which determined his soul to a great resolve. He made up his mind to drown himself in the river.

He remembered, in fact, that eight days before a poor devil who begged for his livelihood had thrown himself into the water because he had no more money. Simon had been there when they fished him out again; and the wretched man, who usually seemed to him so miserable, and ugly, had then struck him as being so peaceful with his pale cheeks, his long drenched beard, and his open eyes full of calm. The bystanders had said:

"He is dead."

And some one had said:

"He is quite happy now."

And Simon wished to drown himself also, because he had no father, just like the wretched being who had no money.

He reached the water and watched it flowing. Some fish were sporting briskly in the clear stream and occasionally made a little bound and caught the flies flying on the surface. He stopped crying in order to watch them, for their maneuvers interested him greatly. But, at intervals, as in a tempest intervals of calm alternate suddenly with tremendous gusts of wind, which snap off the trees and then lose themselves in the horizon, this thought would return to him with intense pain:

"I am going to drown myself because I have no papa."

It was very warm, fine weather. The pleasant sunshine warmed the grass. The water shone like a mirror. And Simon enjoyed some minutes of happiness, of that languor which follows weeping, and felt inclined to fall asleep there upon the grass in the warm sunshine.

A little green frog leaped from under his feet. He endeavored to catch it. It escaped him. He followed it and lost it three times in succession. At last he caught it by one of its hind legs and began to laugh as he saw the efforts the creature made to escape. It gathered itself up on its hind legs and then with a violent spring suddenly stretched them out as stiff as two bars; while it beat the air with its front legs as though they were hands, its round eyes staring in their circle of yellow. It reminded him of a toy made of straight slips of wood nailed zigzag one on the other, which by a similar movement regulated the movements of the little soldiers fastened thereon. Then he thought of his home, and then of his mother, and, overcome by sorrow, he again began to weep. A shiver passed over him. He knelt down and said his prayers as before going to bed. But he was unable to finish them, for tumultuous, violent sobs shook his whole frame. He no longer thought, he no longer saw anything around him, and was wholly absorbed in crying.

Suddenly a heavy hand was placed upon his shoulder, and a rough voice asked him:

"What is it that causes you so much grief, my little man?"

Simon turned round. A tall workman with a beard and black curly hair was staring at him good-naturedly. He answered with his eyes and throat full of tears:

"They beat me . . . because . . . I . . . I have no . . . papa . . . no papa."

"What!" said the man, smiling; "why, everybody has one."

The child answered painfully amid his spasms of grief:

"But I . . . I . . . I have none."

Then the workman became serious. He had recognized La Blanchotte's son, and, although himself a new arrival in the neighborhood, he had a vague idea of her history.

"Well," said he, "console yourself my boy, and come with me home to your mother. They will give you . . . a papa."

And so they started on the way, the big fellow holding the little fellow by the hand, and the man smiled, for he was not sorry to see this Blanchotte, who was, it was said, one of the prettiest girls of the countryside, and, perhaps, he was saying to himself, at the bottom of his heart, that a lass who had erred might very well err again.

They arrived in front of a very neat little white house.

"There it is," exclaimed the child, and he cried "Mamma!"

A woman appeared, and the workman instantly left off smiling, for he saw at once that there was no fooling to be done with the tall pale girl who stood austerely at her door as though to defend from one man the threshold of that house where she had already been betrayed by another. Intimidated, his cap in his hand, he at length stammered out:

"See, Madame, I have brought you back your little boy who had lost himself near the river."

But Simon flung his arms about his mother's neck and told her, as he again began to cry:

"No, mamma, I wished to drown myself, because the others had beaten me . . . had beaten me . . . because I have no papa."

A burning redness covered the young woman's cheeks; and, hurt to the quick, she embraced her child passionately, while the tears coursed down her face. The man, much moved, stood there, not knowing how to get away. But Simon suddenly ran to him and said:

"Will you be my papa?"

A deep silence ensued. La Blanchotte, dumb and tortured with shame, leaned herself against the wall, both her hands upon her heart. The child, seeing that no answer was made him, replied:

"If you will not, I shall go back and drown myself."

The workman took the matter as a jest and answered, laughing:

"Why, yes, certainly I will."

"What is your name," went on the child, "so that I may tell the others when they wish to know your name?"

"Philip," answered the man.

Simon was silent a moment so that he might get the name well into his head; then he stretched out his arms, quite consoled, as he said:

"Well, then, Philip, you are my papa."

The workman, lifting him from the ground, kissed him hastily on both cheeks, and then walked away very quickly with great strides.

When the child returned to school next day he was received with a spiteful laugh, and at the end of school, when the lads were on the point of recom-

mencing, Simon threw these words at their heads as he would have done a stone: "He is named Philip, my papa."

Yells of delight burst out from all sides.

"Philip who? . . . Philip what? What on earth is Philip? Where did you pick up your Philip?"

Simon answered nothing; and, immovable in his faith, he defied them with his eye, ready to be martyred rather than fly before them. The school master came to his rescue and he returned home to his mother.

During three months, the tall workman, Philip, frequently passed by La Blanchotte's house, and sometimes he made bold to speak to her when he saw her sewing near the window. She answered him civilly, always sedately, never joking with him, nor permitting him to enter her house. Notwithstanding, being, like all men, a bit of a coxcomb, he imagined that she was often rosier than usual when she chatted with him.

But a lost reputation is so difficult to regain and always remains so fragile that, in spite of the shy reserve of La Blanchotte, they already gossiped in the neighborhood.

As for Simon, he loved his new papa very much, and walked with him nearly every evening when the day's work was done. He went regularly to school, and mixed with great dignity with his schoolfellows without ever answering them back.

One day, however, the lad who had first attacked him said to him:

"You have lied. You have not a papa named Philip."

"Why do you say that?" demanded Simon.

The youth rubbed his hands. He replied:

" Because if you had one he would be your mamma's husband."

Simon was confused by the truth of this reasoning; nevertheless, he retorted:

" He is my papa, all the same."

" That can very well be," exclaimed the urchin with a sneer, " but that is not being your papa altogether."

La Blanchotte's little one bowed his head and went off dreaming in the direction of the forge belonging to old Loizon, where Philip worked.

This forge was as though buried beneath trees. It was very dark there; the red glare of a formidable furnace alone lit up with great flashes five blacksmiths, who hammered upon their anvils with a terrible din. They were standing enveloped in flame, like demons, their eyes fixed on the red-hot iron they were pounding; and their dull ideas rose and fell with their hammers.

Simon entered without being noticed, and went quietly to pluck his friend by the sleeve. The latter turned round. All at once the work came to a standstill, and all the men looked on, very attentive. Then, in the midst of this unaccustomed silence, rose the little slender pipe of Simon:

" Philip, explain to me what the lad at La Michande has just told me, that you are not altogether my papa."

" And why that? " asked the smith.

The child replied with all its innocence:

" Because you are not my mamma's husband."

No one laughed. Philip remained standing, leaning his forehead upon the back of his great hands, which supported the handle of his hammer

standing upright upon the anvil. He mused. His four companions watched him, and Simon, a tiny mite among these giants, anxiously waited. Suddenly, one of the smiths, answering to the sentiment of all, said to Philip:

"La Blanchotte is a good, honest girl, and upright and steady in spite of her misfortune, and would make a worthy wife for an honest man."

"That is true," remarked the three others.

The smith continued:

"Is it the girl's fault if she went wrong? She had been promised marriage; and I know more than one who is much respected to-day, and who sinned every bit as much."

"That is true," responded the three men in chorus.

He resumed:

"How hard she has toiled, poor thing, to bring up her child all alone, and how she has wept all these years she has never gone out except to church, God only knows."

"This is also true," said the others.

Then nothing was heard but the bellows which fanned the fire of the furnace. Philip hastily bent himself down to Simon:

"Go and tell your mother that I am coming to speak to her this evening."

Then he pushed the child out by the shoulders. He returned to his work, and with a single blow the five hammers again fell upon their anvils. Thus they wrought the iron until nightfall, strong, powerful, happy, like contented hammers. But just as the great bell of a cathedral resounds upon feast days above the jingling of the other bells, so Philip's hammer, sounding above the rest, clanged sec-

ond after second with a deafening uproar. And he stood amid the flying sparks plying his trade.

The sky was full of stars as he knocked at La Blanchotte's door. He had on his Sunday blouse, a clean shirt, and his beard was trimmed. The

young woman showed herself upon the threshold, and said in a grieved tone:

"It is ill to come thus when night has fallen, Monsieur Philip."

He wished to answer, but stammered and stood confused before her.

She resumed:

"You understand, do you not, that it will not do for me to be talked about again."

Then he said all at once:

"What does that matter to me, if you will be my wife!"

No voice replied to him, but he believed that he heard in the shadow of the room the sound of a falling body. He entered quickly; and Simon, who had gone to his bed, distinguished the sound of a kiss and some words that his mother murmured softly. Then, all at once, he found himself lifted up by the hands of his friend, who, holding him at the length of his herculean arms, exclaimed:

"You will tell them, your schoolmates, that your papa is Philip Rémy, the blacksmith, and that he will pull the ears of all who do you any harm."

On the morrow, when the school was full and lessons were about to begin, little Simon stood up, quite pale, with trembling lips:

"My papa," said he in a clear voice, "is Philip Rémy, the blacksmith, and he has promised to pull the ears of all who do me any harm."

This time no one laughed, for he was very well known, was Philip Rémy, the blacksmith, and was a papa of whom any one in the world would have been proud.

THE THIEF

WHILE apparently thinking of something else, Doctor Sorbier had been listening quietly to those amazing accounts of burglaries and daring deeds that might have been taken from the trial of Cartouche. "Assuredly," he exclaimed, "assuredly, I know of no viler fault nor any meaner action than to attack a girl's innocence, to corrupt her, to profit by a moment of unconscious weakness and of madness, when her heart is beating like that of a frightened fawn, and her pure lips seek those of her tempter; when she abandons herself without thinking of the irremediable stain, nor of her fall, nor of the morrow.

"The man who has brought this about slowly,

viciously—who can tell with what science of evil?—and who, in such a case, has not steadiness and self-restraint enough to quench that flame by some icy words, who has not sense enough for two, who cannot recover his self-possession and master the runaway brute within him, and who loses his head on the edge of the precipice over which she is about to fall, is as contemptible as any man who breaks open a lock, or as any rascal on the lookout for a house left defenceless and unprotected, or for some easy and dishonest stroke of business, or as that thief whose various exploits you have just related to us.

"I, for my part, utterly refuse to absolve him, even when extenuating circumstances plead in his favor, even when he is carrying on a dangerous flirtation, in which a man tries in vain to keep his balance, not to exceed the limits of the game, any more than at lawn tennis; even when the parts are inverted and a man's adversary is some precocious, curious, seductive girl, who shows you immediately that she has nothing to learn and nothing to experience, except the last chapter of love, one of those girls from whom may fate always preserve our sons, and whom a psychological novel-writer has christened *The Demi-Virgins.*

"It is, of course, difficult and painful for that coarse and unfathomable vanity which is characteristic of every man, and which might be called *maleism,* not to stir such a charming fire, difficult to act the Joseph and the fool, to turn away his eyes, and, as it were, to put wax into his ears, like the companions of Ulysses when they were attracted by the divine, seductive songs of the sirens, difficult only to touch that pretty table, covered with a perfectly

new cloth, at which you are invited to take a seat before any one else, in such a suggestive voice, and are requested to quench your thirst and to taste that new wine, whose fresh and strange flavor you will never forget. But who would hesitate to exercise such self-restraint if, when he rapidly examines his conscience, in one of those instinctive returns to his sober self in which a man thinks clearly and recovers his head, he were to measure the gravity of his fault, consider it, think of its consequences, of the reprisals, of the uneasiness which he would always feel in the future, and which would destroy the repose and happiness of his life?

"You may guess that behind all these moral reflections, such as a graybeard like myself may indulge in, there is a story hidden, and, sad as it is, I am sure it will interest you on account of the strange heroism that it shows."

He was silent for a few moments, as if to classify his recollections, and, with his elbows resting on the arms of his easy-chair and his eyes looking into space, he continued in the slow voice of a hospital professor who is explaining a case to his class of medical students, at a bedside:

"He was one of those men who, as our grandfathers used to say, never met with a cruel woman, the type of the adventurous knight who was always foraging, who had something of the scamp about him, but who despised danger and was bold even to rashness. He was ardent in the pursuit of pleasure, and had an irresistible charm about him, one of those men in whom we excuse the greatest excesses as the most natural things in the world. He had run through all his money at gambling and with pretty girls, and so became, as it were, a sol-

dier of fortune. He amused himself whenever and however he could, and was at that time quartered at Versailles.

"I knew him to the very depths of his childlike heart, which was only too easily penetrated and sounded, and I loved him as some old bachelor uncle loves a nephew who plays him tricks, but who knows how to coax him. He had made me his confidant rather than his adviser, kept me informed of his slightest pranks, though he always pretended to be speaking about one of his friends, and not about himself; and I must confess that his youthful impetuosity, his careless gayety, and his amorous ardor sometimes distracted my thoughts and made me envy the handsome, vigorous young fellow who was so happy at being alive that I had not the courage to check him, to show him the right road, and to call out to him: 'Take care!' as children do at blind-man's-buff.

"And one day, after one of those interminable cotillons, where the couples do not leave each other for hours, and can disappear together without anybody thinking of noticing them, the poor fellow at last discovered what love was, that real love which takes up its abode in the very center of the heart and in the brain, and is proud of being there, and which rules like a sovereign and a tyrannous master; and he became desperately enamored of a pretty but badly brought up girl, who was as disquieting and wayward as she was pretty.

"She loved him, however, or rather she idolized him despotically, madly, with all her enraptured soul and all her being. Left to do as she pleased by imprudent and frivolous parents, suffering from neurosis, in consequence of the unwholesome friend-

ships which she contracted at the convent school, instructed by what she saw and heard and knew was going on around her, in spite of her deceitful and artificial conduct, knowing that neither her father nor her mother, who were very proud of their race as well as avaricious, would ever agree to let her marry the man whom she had taken a liking to, that handsome fellow who had little besides visionary ideas and debts, and who belonged to the middle class, she laid aside all scruples, thought of nothing but of becoming his, no matter what might be the cost.

"By degrees, the unfortunate man's strength gave way, his heart softened, and he allowed himself to be carried away by that current which buffeted him, surrounded him, and left him on the shore like a waif and a stray.

"They wrote letters full of madness to each other, and not a day passed without their meeting, either accidentally, as it seemed, or at parties and balls. She had yielded her lips to him in long, ardent caresses, which had sealed their compact of mutual passion."

The doctor stopped, and his eyes suddenly filled with tears, as these former troubles came back to his mind; and then, in a hoarse voice, he went on, full of the horror of what he was going to relate:

"For months he scaled the garden wall, and, holding his breath and listening for the slightest noise, like a burglar who is going to break into a house, he went in by the servants' entrance, which she had left open, slunk barefoot down a long passage and up the broad staircase, which creaked occasionally, to the second story, where his sweetheart's room was, and stayed there for hours.

" One night, when it was darker than usual, and he was hurrying lest he should be later than the time agreed on, he knocked up against a piece of furniture in the anteroom and upset it. It so happened that the girl's mother had not gone to sleep, either because she had a sick headache, or else because she had sat up late over some novel, and, frightened at that unusual noise which disturbed the silence of the house, she jumped out of bed, opened the door, saw some one indistinctly running away and keeping close to the wall, and, immediately thinking that there were burglars in the house, she aroused her husband and the servants by her frantic screams. The unfortunate man understood the situation, and, seeing what a terrible fix he was in, and preferring to be taken for a common thief to dishonoring his adored one's name, he ran into the drawing-room, felt on the tables and what-nots, filled his pockets at random with valuable bric-à-brac, and then cowered down behind the grand piano, which barred the corner of a large room.

" The servants, who had run in with lighted candles, found him, and, overwhelming him with abuse, seized him by the collar and dragged him, panting and apparently half dead with shame and terror, to the nearest police station. He defended himself with intentional awkwardness, when he was brought up for trial, kept up his part with the most perfect self-possession and without any signs of the despair and anguish that he felt in his heart, and, condemned and degraded and made to suffer martyrdom in his honor as a man and a soldier—he was an officer—he did not protest, but went to prison as one of those criminals whom society gets rid of like noxious vermin.

"He died there of misery and of bitterness of spirit, with the name of the fair-haired idol, for whom he had sacrificed himself, on his lips, as if it had been an ecstatic prayer, and he intrusted his will to the priest who administered extreme unction to him, and requested him to give it to me. In it, without mentioning anybody, and without in the least lifting the veil, he at last explained the enigma, and cleared himself of those accusations the terrible burden of which he had borne until his last breath.

"I have always thought myself, though I do not know why, that the girl married and had several charming children, whom she brought up with the austere strictness and in the serious piety of former days!"

MY LANDLADY

WAS living at that time," said George Kervelen, " in the Rue des Saints-Pères in a furnished room.

" When my father had made up his mind that I should go to Paris to continue my law studies, there had been a long discussion about ways and means. My allowance had been fixed at two thousand five hundred francs, but my poor mother was so anxious that she said to my father that if I spent my money badly I might not take enough to eat, and then my health would suffer; and so it was settled that a comfortable boarding house should be found for me, and that the amount should be paid to the proprietor himself, or herself, every month.

" Some of our neighbors told us of a certain Madame Kergaran, a native of Brittany, who took in boarders, and my father arranged matters by letter with this respectable person, at whose house I and my luggage arrived one evening.

"Madame Kergaran was a woman of about forty. She was very stout, had a voice like a drill sergeant, and decided everything in a very abrupt manner. Her house was narrow, with only one window opening on to the street on each story, which rather gave it the appearance of a ladder of windows, or better, perhaps, of a slice of a house sandwiched in between two others.

"The landlady lived on the first floor with her servant, the kitchen and dining room were on the second, and four boarders from Brittany lived on the third and fourth, and I had two rooms on the fifth.

"A little dark corkscrew staircase led up to these attics. All day long Madame Kergaran was up and down these stairs like a captain on board ship. Ten times a day she would go into each room, noisily superintending everything, seeing that the beds were properly made, the clothes well brushed, and if the attendance was all that it should be; in a word, she looked after her boarders like a mother, and better than a mother.

"I soon made the acquaintance of my four fellow countrymen. Two were medical and two were law students, but all impartially endured the landlady's despotic yoke. They were as afraid of her as a boy robbing an orchard would be of a rural policeman.

"I, however, immediately felt that I wished to be independent; it is my nature to rebel. I declared at once that I meant to come in at whatever time I liked, for Madame Kergaran had fixed twelve o'clock at night as the limit. On hearing this, she looked at me for a few moments, and then said:

"'It is quite impossible; I cannot have Annette

called up at any hour of the night. You can have nothing to do out of doors at such a time.'

"I replied firmly that, according to the law, she was obliged to open the door for me at any time.

"'If you refuse,' I said, 'I shall get a policeman to witness the fact, and go and get a bed at some hotel, at your expense, in which I shall be fully justified. You will, therefore, be obliged either to open the door for me or to get rid of me. Do which you please.'

"I laughed in her face as I told her my conditions. She could not speak for a moment for surprise; then she tried to negotiate, but I was firm, and she was obliged to yield; and so it was agreed that I should have a latchkey, on my solemn promise that no one else should know it.

"My energy made such a wholesome impression on her that from that time she treated me with marked favor; she was most attentive, and even showed me a sort of rough tenderness which was not at all unpleasing. Sometimes when I was in a jovial mood I would kiss her by surprise, if only

for the sake of getting the box on the ears which she gave me immediately afterward. When I managed to duck my head quickly enough, her hand would pass over me as swiftly as a ball, and I would run away laughing, while she could call after me:

"'Oh, you wretch! I will pay you out for that.'

"However, we soon became real friends.

"It was not long before I made the acquaintance of a girl who was employed in a shop, and whom I constantly met. You know what such sort of love affairs are in Paris. One fine day, going to a lecture, you meet a workgirl going to work arm in arm with a friend. You look at her, and feel that pleasant little shock which the eye of some women gives you. The next day at the same time, going through the same street, you meet her again, and the next, and the succeeding days. At last you speak, and the love affair follows its course just like an illness.

"Well, by the end of three weeks, I was on a solid footing with Emma. The girl lived at home, and utterly refused to go to the cafés with me. I did not know how to manage, but at last I took the desperate resolve to take her to my room some night at about eleven o'clock under the pretense of giving her a cup of tea. Madame Kergaran always went to bed at ten, so that we could get in by means of my latchkey without exciting any attention, and go down again in an hour or two in the same way.

"After a good deal of entreaty on my part, Emma accepted my invitation.

"I did not spend a very pleasant day, for I was by no means easy in my mind. I was afraid of complications, of a catastrophe, of some scandal. At night I went into a café, and drank two cups of

coffee and three or four glasses of cognac, to give me courage, and when I heard the clock strike half-past ten, I went slowly to the place of meeting, where she was already waiting for me. She took my arm in a coaxing manner, and we set off slowly toward my lodgings. The nearer we got to the door, the more nervous I got; and I thought to myself: 'If only Madame Kergaran is in bed already.'

"I said to Emma two or three times:

"'Above all things, don't make any noise on the stairs,' to which she replied, laughing:

"'Are you afraid of being heard?'

"'No,' I said, 'but I am afraid of waking the man who sleeps in the room next to me, who is not at all well.'

"When I got near the house I felt as frightened as a man does who is going to the dentist's. All the windows were dark, so no doubt everybody was asleep, and I breathed again. I opened the door as carefully as a thief, let my fair companion in, shut it behind me, and went upstairs on tiptoe, holding my breath, and striking candle matches lest the girl should make a false step.

"As we passed the landlady's door I felt my heart beating very quickly, but we reached the second floor, then the third, and at last the fifth, and got into my room. Victory!

"However, I only dared to speak in a whisper, and took off my boots so as not to make any noise. The tea, which I made over a spirit lamp, was soon drunk, and then I became pressing, till, little by little, as if in play, I took off my companion's wraps. She yielded, while resisting, blushing, confused.

"Just then my door suddenly opened, and Ma-

dame Kergaran appeared with a candle in her hand.

" I jumped away from her, and remained standing, looking at the two women, who were looking at each other. I wondered what was going to happen?

" My landlady said, in a lofty tone of voice which I had never heard from her before:

" ' Monsieur Kervelen, I will not have such actions in my house.'

" ' But, Madame Kergaran,' I stammered, ' the young lady is a friend of mine. She just came in to have a cup of tea.'

" ' Respectable girls don't take tea in young gentlemen's rooms. You will please make this person go directly.'

" Emma, in a natural state of consternation, began to cry, and hid her face in her petticoat, and I lost my head, not knowing what to do or say. My landlady added, with irresistible authority:

" ' Take her out at once.'

" It was certainly the only thing I could do; so I picked up her coat from the floor, put it over her, and began to fasten it as best I could. She helped me, crying all the time, hurrying and making all sorts of mistakes, and Madame Kergaran stood by motionless, with the candle in her hand, looking at us with the severity of a judge.

" As soon as Emma had on her wraps, she rushed past the landlady and ran downstairs. I followed her with my slippers half on, and kept repeating: ' Mademoiselle! Mademoiselle! '

" I felt I ought to say something to her, but I could not find anything to say. I overtook her just by the street door, and tried to put my arms around

her, but she pushed me violently away, saying in a low, nervous voice:

"'Leave me alone, leave me alone!' and so ran out into the street, closing the door behind her.

"When I went upstairs again I found that Madame Kergaran was waiting on the first landing, and I went up slowly, expecting, and ready for, anything.

"Her door was open, and she called me in, saying in a severe voice:

"'I want to speak to you, Monsieur Kervelen.'

"I went in, with my head bent. She put her candle on the mantelpiece, and then, folding her arms over her expansive bosom, which a fine white dressing jacket hardly covered, she said:

"'Monsieur Kervelen, what kind of house do you think I keep?'

"I was not at all proud. I murmured:

"'But, Madame Kergaran, you must not be angry; you know what young men are.'

"'I know,' was her answer, 'that I will not have such creatures here; so you will understand that. I expect to have my house respected, and I will not have it lose its reputation, you understand me? I know . . .'

"She went on thus for at least twenty minutes, overwhelming me with the good name of her house, with reasons for her indignation, and loading me with severe reproofs. I went to bed crestfallen, and resolved never again to try such an experiment, so long, at least, as I continued to be a lodger of Madame Kergaran's."

A DIVORCE CASE

MADAME CHASSEL'S lawyer thus addressed the court:

"Your Honor, and Gentlemen of the Jury: The case I am going to present to you is rather a subject for the medical profession than for the courts, and is a question of pathology rather than ordinary law. The facts appear very simple at first sight. A very rich young man, with a noble and cultivated mind and a generous heart, becomes enamored of a young lady who is the perfection of beauty, more than beautiful, in fact; she is adorable, and as gracious, as charming, as good and as tender as she is pretty; and he marries her. For some time, he behaves not only as a devoted husband, but as a man full of solicitude and tenderness. Then he neglects her, misuses her, seems to entertain for her an insurmountable aversion, an irresistible disgust. One day he even strikes her, not only without any

cause, but even without the faintest pretext. I am not going, gentlemen, to draw a picture of his extraordinary actions, which no one could comprehend. I shall not depict to you the wretched life of those two beings and the horrible grief of this young woman. It will be sufficient to convince you if I read some fragments from a journal written every day by that poor young man, by that poor lunatic! For we now find ourselves, gentlemen, confronted by a crazy man, and the case is all the more curious, all the more interesting, seeing that, in many points, he recalls the insanity of the unfortunate prince who recently died, of the witless king who reigned platonically over Bavaria. I shall hence designate this case poetic insanity.

"You will readily call to mind all that has been told of that most singular prince. He caused veritable fairy castles to be erected amid the most magnificent scenery in his kingdom. The actual beauty of the things themselves, as well as of the places, did not satisfy him. He invented, he created, in these fairy domains, factitious landscapes, obtained by means of theatrical artifices, shifting scenes, painted forests, fabled empires, in which the leaves of the trees were precious stones. He had Alps, glaciers, steppes, deserts of sand scorched by the sun; and at night, under the rays of the real moon, lakes lighted from below by fantastic electric lights. Swans floated on the lakes, on which floated canoes, while an orchestra, composed of the finest performers in the world, inebriated with poetry the soul of the royal lunatic. The man was chaste, the man was a virgin. He only loved a dream, his dream, his divine dream. One evening he took out with him in his boat a lady, young and beautiful, a great

artist, and he begged her to sing. Intoxicated by the magnificent scenery, by the soft warmth of the air, by the perfume of the flowers, and by the ecstasy of that young and handsome prince, she sang, she sang as women sing who have been touched by love; then, overcome, trembling, she fell on the bosom of the King. But he threw her into the lake, and, seizing his oars, rowed back to the shore, without caring whether any one saved her or not.

" Gentlemen of the jury, we find ourselves in presence of a case similar to this in every respect. I shall say no more now, except to read some passages from the journal which we unexpectedly came upon in the drawer of an old writing desk.

* * * * * * *

" ' How sad and ugly everything is; always the same, always hateful! How I dream of a land more beautiful, more noble, more varied! How poor the imagination of their God must be, if their God existed, or if He had not created other things, elsewhere! Always woods, little woods; waves which resemble waves; plains which resemble plains; everything is sameness and monotony. And man?—man! What a horrible animal—wicked, haughty, and repugnant!

* * * * * * *

" ' It is essential to love, to love to perdition, without seeing that which one loves. For to see is to understand, and to understand is to despise. One should become intoxicated with love just as one gets drunk with wine, until one knows no longer what

one is drinking. And to drink, to drink, to drink, without drawing breath, day and night!

* * * * * * *

"'I have found her, I believe. She has about her something ideal which does not belong to this world, and which gives wings to my dream. Ah! my dream! How it reveals to me beings different from what they really are! She is a blonde, a delicate blonde, with hair whose shading is indescribable. Her eyes are blue! Only blue eyes can captivate my soul. Woman, the woman who exists in my heart, is present to my eye, only to my eye. Oh! what a mystery, what a mystery is the eye! The whole universe is in it, inasmuch as it sees, inasmuch as it reflects. It contains the universe, both things and beings, forests and oceans, men and beasts, the settings of the sun, the stars, the arts—all, all, it sees; it collects and absorbs all; and there is still more in it; the eye has in it a soul; it has in it the man who thinks, the man who loves, the man who laughs, the man who suffers! Oh! look at the blue eyes of women, those eyes that are as deep as the sea, as changeful as the sky, so sweet, so soft, soft as the breezes, sweet as music, sweet as kisses; and transparent, so clear that one sees through them, discerns the soul, the blue soul which colors them, which animates them, which makes them divine. Yes, the soul has the color of the eye. The blue soul alone contains dreams; it takes its azure from the floods and from space. The eye! Think of it, the eye! It drinks in the visible life, and from it produces thought. It drinks in the world, color, motion, books, pictures, all that is beautiful, all that is ugly, and weaves ideas out of

them. And when it beams on us, it gives us the sensation of a happiness that is not of this earth. It gives us a presentiment of things we shall never know; it makes us understand that the realities of our dreams are but contemptible rubbish.

* * * * * * *

"'I love her, also, for her walk. "Even when the bird walks one feels that it has wings," as the poet says. When she passes by, one feels that she is of different race from ordinary women, of a race more ethereal and more divine. I shall marry her to-morrow. But I am afraid, I am afraid of so many things!

* * * * * * *

"'Two animals, two dogs, two wolves, two foxes, cut their way through plantation and encounter one another. One of them is male, the other female. They mate. They mate in consequence of an animal instinct, which forces them to continue the race, their race, the one they represent in their hairy covering, their form, their movements and habits. The whole animal creation does the same without knowing why.

"'We human beings, also . . .

"'I did the same when I married; I obeyed that idiotic passion which attracts us to the female.

* * * * * * *

"'She is my wife. As long as I loved her ideally she was to me an unrealizable dream that was just on the point of becoming a reality. But from the very second after I held her in my arms

she was no more to me than the being whom nature had made use of to deceive all my hopes.

" ' Has she disappointed them? No. And yet I have grown weary of her, weary so that I cannot touch her even with the tip of my fingers, or my lips, without a sense of unutterable disgust, not perhaps disgust with her, but a higher, greater, more contemptuous disgust; the disgust, in a word, with carnal love, so vile has it become for all refined beings, a shameful thing, which it is necessary to conceal, which one never speaks of save in a whisper, nor without blushing.

* * * * * * *

" ' I can no longer bear the idea of my wife coming near me, calling me with a smile, with a glance, or with her embrace; I cannot endure it. At one time I thought a kiss from her would transport me to the seventh heaven. One day, when she was suffering from one of those transient fevers, I noticed in her breath a subtle, slight, almost imperceptible odor of human putrefaction; I was completely upset.

" ' Oh! the flesh, that seductive and living mass of corruption that walks, thinks, speaks, looks, laughs, in which nourishment ferments and rots, which, nevertheless, is rose-colored, pretty, tempting, deceitful as the soul itself.

* * * * * * *

" ' Why do flowers alone smell so sweet, those large flowers, brilliant or pale, whose tones and shades make my heart tremble and trouble my eyes? They are so beautiful, their structure is so delicate, so varied and so sensual, semi-opened like human

organs, more tempting than a human mouth, and hollow with curling lips, dentated with a delicate skin, and powdered with a living pollen that imparts to each a different fragrance, which in each gives forth a distinct perfume.

" ' They reproduce themselves, they alone, in the world, without polluting their inviolable race, shedding around them the divine incense of their love, the fragrant perfume of their caresses, the essence of their incomparable forms, of those forms, adorned with every grace, with every elegance, and of every shape; who have likewise the coquetry of every shade of color and the intoxicating seductiveness of every variety of perfume.'

* * * * * * *

FRAGMENTS SELECTED SIX MONTHS LATER

" ' I love flowers, not as flowers, but as material and delicious things; I pass my days and my nights in greenhouses, where I conceal them from public view like the women of a harem.

" ' Who knows, except myself, the sweetness, the infatuation, the quivering, carnal, ideal, superhuman ecstasy of these tendernesses; and those kisses upon the bare flesh of a rose, upon the blushing flesh, upon the white skin, so miraculously different, delicate, rare, subtle, unctuous, of these adorable flowers?

" ' I have greenhouses that no one has seen except myself, and which I tend myself.

" ' I enter them as one would glide into a place of secret pleasure. In the lofty glass houses I pass first between two rows of closed, half-opened, or

full-blown corollas on graduated shelves from floor to roof. This is the first kiss they are sending me.

" ' These flowers just mentioned, these flowers which adorn the vestibule of my mysterious passions, are my servants and not my favorites.

" ' They greet me as I pass by with their changing brilliance and their fresh fragrance. They are darlings, coquettes, ranged in eight rows to the right, eight rows to the left, and so laid out that they look like two gardens springing up from under my feet.

" ' My heart palpitates, my eyes flash at the sight of them; my blood rushes through my veins, my soul is elated, and my hands tremble with a desire to touch them. I pass on. There are three closed doors at the bottom of that greenhouse. I can make my choice of them. I have three harems.

" ' But I enter most frequently the orchid house, my favorite charmers. Their hothouse is low, suffocating. The humid, hot air makes the skin moist, takes away one's breath, and makes one's fingers tremble. They come, these foreigners, from a marshy, burning, and unhealthy land. They attract one as do the sirens, are as deadly as poison, admirably fantastic, enervating, terrifying. Here are some like butterflies with enormous wings, tiny feet, and eyes! For they have eyes! They look at me, they see me, prodigious unreal beings, fairies, daughters of the sacred earth, of the impalpable air, and of rays of the ardent light, that mother of the universe. Yes, they have wings, they have eyes, and lines that no painter could imitate; every charm, every grace, every form that one could dream of. Their corollas are hollow, fragrant, and transparent, ever open to love and more tempting

than all the flesh of women. The unimaginable designs of their little beings transport the intoxicated soul to a paradise of dreams and of voluptuous ideals. They tremble upon their stems as though they would fly. Will they fly? Will they come to me? No, it is my heart that hovers o'er them, like a mystic male tortured by love.

" ' No wing of any animal can touch them. We are alone, they and I, in the lighted prison which I have had constructed for them. I gaze at them, I contemplate them, I admire them, I adore them, one after the other.

" ' How healthy, strong and rosy they are, a rosiness that moistens the lips of desire! How I love them! The edge of their calyx is crinkly, paler than the center where the corolla hides itself, that mysterious mouth, sweet as sugar to the taste that reveals and unveils the delicate, admirable, and sacred organs of these divine little creatures which have such exquisite fragrance, and do not speak.

" ' I sometimes have a passion for some of them that lasts as long as their existence, which only covers a few days and nights. I then have them taken away from the general hothouse and inclosed in a pretty glass cabinet, in which a thread of water murmurs along a bed of tropical verdure, which has been brought from one of the Pacific Islands. And I stay beside it, ardent, feverish, and tormented, knowing that its death is near, and watch it fading away, while, in thought, I possess it, aspire to its love, drink it in, and then pluck its short life with an unutterable caress.' "

When he had finished the reading of these fragments, the advocate continued:

" Decency, gentlemen of the jury, hinders me

from communicating to you the extraordinary avowals of this shamelessly idealistic lunatic. The fragments that I have just mentioned to you will be sufficient, in my opinion, to enable you to appreciate this instance of mental malady, less rare than might be supposed in our epoch of hysterical insanity and of corrupt decadence.

"I think, then, that my client is more entitled than any other woman to claim a divorce under the exceptional position in which she is placed through her husband's peculiar form of insanity."

THE RELICS

HE was given a grand public funeral, such as they give to victorious soldiers who have added some glorious pages to the annals of their country, who have restored courage to despondent rulers and flung the proud shadow of thin flax over other nations like a yoke under which those pass who are deprived of country or liberty. Who knows whether tall cavalry soldiers, in their cuirasses, and sitting as motionless as statues on their horses during an entire bright, calm night, when falling stars make one think of unknown metamorphoses and the transmigration of souls, had not watched by the dead man's coffin, which was resting, covered with wreaths, under the porch of the heroes, every stone of which is engraved with the name of a brave man and of a battle?

The whole town was in mourning, as if it had lost the only object that had possession of its heart

and which it loved. The crowd went silently and thoughtfully down the Avenue of the Champs Elysées, and they almost fought for the commemorative medals and the common portraits which hawkers were selling, or climbed upon the stands which street boys had erected here and there, and whence they could see over the heads of the crowd. The Place de la Concorde had something solemn about it, with its circle of statues hung from head to foot with long crape coverings, which made them look in the distance like widows, weeping and praying.

According to his last wish, Jean Ramel had been conveyed to the Pantheon in the wretched paupers' hearse which carries them to the common grave at the shambling trot of some thin and broken-winded horse.

That dreadful black conveyance, without any drapery, without plumes and without flowers, which was followed by ministers and deputies, by several regiments with their bands and their flags flying above the helmets and the sabers, by children from the national schools, by delegates from the provinces, and an innumerable crowd of men in blouses, of women, of shopkeepers from every quarter, had a most theatrical effect; while standing on the steps of the Pantheon, at the foot of the massive columns of the portico, the orators successively descanted on the apotheosis of the deceased, tried to make their voices predominate over the noise, emphasized their pompous periods, and finished the performance by a poor third act which makes people yawn and gradually empties the theater. People remembered who that man had been on whom such posthumous honors were being bestowed, and who was having such a funeral; it was Jean Ramel.

Those three sonorous syllables called up a leonine head, with white hair thrown back in disorder, like a mane; with features that looked as if they had been cut out with a bill-hook, but were so powerful and contained such a flame of life that one forgot their vulgarity and ugliness; with black eyes under bushy eyebrows, which dilated and flashed like lightning, at one moment veiled as by tears and again filled with serene mildness; a voice which now growled so as almost to terrify its hearers, and which would have filled the hall of some workingman's club full of the thick smoke from strong pipes, without being affected by it, and then would be soft, coaxing, persuasive, and unctuous, like that of a priest who is holding out promises of Paradise or giving absolution for our sins.

He had had the good luck to be persecuted; to be in the eyes of the people the incarnation of that lying formula which appears on every public edifice, of those three words of the Golden Age, which make those who think, those who suffer, and those who govern, smile somewhat sadly—Liberty, Fraternity, Equality. Luck had been kind to him, had sustained, had pushed him on by the shoulders, and had set him up on his pedestal again when he had fallen down, as all idols do.

He spoke and wrote, and always to announce the good news to all the multitudes who suffered—no matter to what grade of society they might belong—to hold out his hand to them and to defend them, to attack the abuses of the Code—that book of injustice and severity—to speak the truth boldly, even when it lashed his enemies as if with a whip.

His books were like gospels which are read, chapter by chapter, and warmed the most despair-

ing and the most sorrowing hearts, and brought comfort, hope, and dreams to each.

He had lived very modestly until the end, and appeared to spend nothing; and he only kept one old servant, who spoke to him in the Basque dialect.

The chaste philosopher, who had all his life long feared women's snares and wiles, who had looked upon love as a luxury made only for the rich and idle, which unsettles the brain and interferes with acuteness of thought, had allowed himself to be caught like any ordinary man—late in life, when his hair was white and his forehead deeply wrinkled.

It was not, however, as happens in the visions of solitary ascetics, some strange queen or female magician, with stars in her eyes and witchery in her voice, some loose woman who held up the symbolical lamp immodestly, to light up her radiant nudity and the pink-and-white bouquet of her sweet-smelling skin, some woman in search of voluptuous pleasures, whose lascivious appeals it is impossible for any man to listen to without being excited to the very depths of his being. Neither a princess out of some fairy tale, nor a frail beauty who was an expert in the art of awakening the emotions of old men and of leading them astray, nor a woman who was disgusted with her ideals, that always turned out to be alike, and who dreamed of awakening the soul of one of those men who suffer, one of those who have afforded so much alleviation to human misery, who seem to be surrounded by a halo, and who never know anything but the true, the beautiful, and the good.

It was only a little girl of twenty, who was as

pretty as a wild flower, who had a ringing laugh, white teeth, and a mind that was as spotless as a new mirror, in which no figure had been reflected as yet.

He was in exile at the time for having given public expression to his opinions, and was living in an Italian village which was buried in chestnut trees and on the shores of a lake that was so narrow and transparent that it might have been taken for some nobleman's fish pond, and looked like an emerald in a large park. It consisted of about twenty red-tiled houses. Steep paths paved with flint led up the side of the hills among the vines, where the Madonna, full of grace and goodness, extended her indulgence from shrines which contained dusty, tinsel nosegays.

For the first time in his life, Ramel remarked that there were some lips that were more desirable, more smiling than others, that there was hair in which it must be delicious to bury the fingers as in fine silk, and which it must be delightful to kiss, and that there were eyes which contained an infinitude of caresses, and he had spelled right through the eclogue, which at length revealed true happiness to him, and he had had a child, a son, by her.

This was the only secret that Ramel jealously concealed, and which no more than two or three of his oldest friends knew anything about; and while he hesitated about spending five centimes on himself, and went to the Institute and to the Chamber of Deputies on the outside of an omnibus, Pepa led the happy life of a millionaire who is not afraid of the to-morrow, and brought up her son like a little prince, with a tutor and three servants, who had nothing to do but to look after him.

All that Ramel made went into her hands, and when he felt that his last hour was approaching, and that there was no hope of his recovery—in full possession of his faculties and with joy in his dull eyes—he gave his name to Pepa, and made her his lawful widow, in the presence of all his friends. She inherited everything that he left behind—a considerable income from his share of the annual profits on his books, and also his pension, which the State continued to pay to her.

Little Ramel throve wonderfully amid all this luxury, and gave free scope to his instincts and his caprices, without his mother ever having the courage to reprove him in the least. He did not bear the slightest resemblance to Jean Ramel.

Full of pranks, effeminate, a superfine dandy, and precociously vicious, he suggested the idea of those pages at the Court of Florence, whom we frequently meet with in the *Decameron,* and who were the playthings of patrician ladies.

He was very ignorant, and lived at a great pace, bet on races, and played cards for heavy stakes with seasoned gamblers old enough to be his father. And it was distressing to hear this lad joke about the memory of him whom he called the old man, and persecute his mother because of the worship and adoration which she felt for Jean Ramel, whom she spoke of as if he had become a demigod when he died, as in Roman theogony.

He would have liked well to alter entirely the arrangement of that kind of sanctuary, the drawing-room, where Pepa kept some of her husband's manuscripts, the furniture that he had most frequently used, the bed on which he had died, his pens, his clothes, and his weapons. And one even-

ing, not knowing how to dress himself up more originally than the rest for a masked ball that stout Toinette Danicheff was going to give as her housewarming, without saying a word to his mother, he took down the Academician's dress, the sword and cocked hat that had belonged to Jean Ramel, and put it on as if it had been a disguise on Shrove Tuesday.

Slightly built, and with thin arms and legs, the wide clothes hung on him, and he was a comical sight, with the embroidered skirt of his coat sweeping the carpet, and his sword knocking against his heels. The elbows and the collar were shiny and greasy from wear, for the Master had worn it until it was threadbare, to avoid having to buy another, and had never thought of replacing it.

He made a tremendous hit, and fair Liline Ablette laughed so at his grimaces and his disguise that that night she threw over Prince Noureddin for him, although he had paid for her house, her horses, and everything else, and allowed her six thousand francs a month—for extras and pocket money.

THE LANCER'S WIFE

I

IT was after Bourbaki's defeat in the East of France. The army, broken up, decimated, and worn out, had been obliged to retreat into Switzerland after that terrible campaign, and it was only its short duration that saved a hundred and fifty thousand men from certain death. Hunger, the terrible cold, forced marches in the snow without boots, over bad mountain roads, had caused us *francs-tireurs,* especially, the greatest suffering, for we were without tents, and almost without food, always in the van when we were marching toward Belfort, and in the rear when returning by the Jura. Of our little band that had numbered twelve hundred men on the first of January, there remained only twenty-two pale, thin, ragged

wretches, when we at length succeeded in reaching Swiss territory.

There we were safe, and could rest. Everybody knows what sympathy was shown to the unfortunate French army, and how well it was cared for. We all gained fresh life, and those who had been rich and happy before the war declared that they had never experienced a greater feeling of comfort than they did then. Just think! We actually had something to eat every day, and could sleep every night.

Meanwhile, the war continued in the East of France, which had been excluded from the armistice. Besançon still kept the enemy in check, and the latter had their revenge by ravaging Franche Comté. Sometimes we heard that they had approached quite close to the frontier, and we saw Swiss troops, who were to form a line of observation between us and them, set out on their march.

That pained us in the end, and, as we regained health and strength, the longing to fight took possession of us. It was disgraceful and irritating to know that within two or three leagues of us the Germans were victorious and insolent, to feel that we were protected by our captivity, and to know that on that account we were powerless against them.

One day our captain took five or six of us aside, and spoke to us about it, long and furiously. He was a fine fellow, that captain. He had been a sub-lieutenant in the zouaves, was tall and thin and as hard as steel, and during the whole campaign he had cut out their work for the Germans. He fretted in inactivity, and could not accustom himself to the idea of being a prisoner and of doing nothing.

"Confound it!" he said to us, "does it not pain you to know that there is a number of uhlans within two hours of us? Does it not almost drive you mad to know that those beggarly wretches are walking about as masters in our mountains, when six determined men might kill a whole spitful any day? I cannot endure it any longer, and I must go there."

"But how can you manage it, Captain?"

"How? It is not very difficult! Just as if we had not done a thing or two within the last six months, and got out of woods that were guarded by very different men from the Swiss. The day that you wish to cross over into France, I will undertake to get you there."

"That may be; but what shall we do in France without any arms?"

"Without arms? We will get them over yonder, by Jove!"

"You are forgetting the treaty," another soldier said; "we shall run the risk of doing the Swiss an injury, if Manteuffel learns that they have allowed prisoners to return to France."

"Come," said the Captain, "those are all bad reasons. I mean to go and kill some Prussians; that is all I care about. If you do not wish to do as I do, well and good; only say so at once. I can quite well go by myself; I do not require anybody's company."

Naturally we all protested, and, as it was quite impossible to make the Captain alter his mind, we felt obliged to promise to go with him. We liked him too much to leave him in the lurch, as he never failed us in any extremity; and so the expedition was decided on.

II

The Captain had a plan of his own, that he had been cogitating over for some time. A man in that part of the country whom he knew was going to lend him a cart and six suits of peasants' clothes. We could hide under some straw at the bottom of the wagon, which would be loaded with Gruyère cheese, which he was supposed to be going to sell in France. The captain told the sentinels that he was taking two friends with him to protect his goods, in case any one should try to rob him, which did not seem an extraordinary precaution. A Swiss officer seemed to look at the wagon in a knowing manner, but that was in order to impress his soldiers. In a word, neither officers nor men could make it out.

"Get up," the captain said to the horses, as he cracked his whip, while our three men quietly smoked their pipes. I was half suffocated in my box, which only admitted the air through those holes in front, and at the same time I was nearly frozen, for it was terribly cold.

"Get up," the captain said again, and the wagon loaded with Gruyère cheese entered France.

The Prussian lines were very badly guarded, as the enemy trusted to the watchfulness of the Swiss. The sergeant spoke North German, while our captain spoke the bad German of the Four Cantons, and so they could not understand each other. The sergeant, however, pretended to be very intelligent; and, in order to make us believe that he understood us, they allowed us to continue our journey; and,

after traveling for seven hours, being continually stopped in the same manner, we arrived at a small village of the Jura, in ruins, at nightfall.

What were we going to do? Our only arms were the captain's whip, our uniforms our peasants' blouses, and our food the Gruyère cheese. Our sole wealth consisted in our ammunition, packages of cartridges which we had stowed away inside some of the huge cheeses. We had about a thousand of them, just two hundred each, but we needed rifles, and they must be *chassepots*. Luckily, however, the Captain was a bold man of an inventive mind, and this was the plan that he hit upon:

While three of us remained hidden in a cellar in the abandoned village, he continued his journey as far as Besançon with the empty wagon and one man. The town was invested, but one can always make one's way into a town among the hills by crossing the tableland till within about ten miles of the walls, and then following paths and ravines on foot. They left their wagon at Omans, among the Germans, and escaped out of it at night on foot, so as to gain the heights which border the river Doubs; the next day they entered Besançon, where there were plenty of *chassepots*. There were nearly forty thousand of them left in the arsenal, and General Roland, a brave marine, laughed at the Captain's daring project, but let him have six rifles and wished him "good luck." There he had also found his wife, who had been through all the war with us before the campaign in the East, and who had been only prevented by illness from continuing with Bourbaki's army. She had recovered, however, in spite of the cold, which was growing more and more intense, and in spite of the numberless privations

that awaited her, she persisted in accompanying her husband. He was obliged to give way to her, and they all three, the Captain, his wife, and our comrade, started on their expedition.

Going was nothing in comparison to returning. They were obliged to travel by night, so as to avoid meeting anybody, as the possession of six rifles would have made them liable to suspicion. But, in spite of everything, a week after leaving us, the Captain and his two men were back with us again. The campaign was about to begin.

III

The first night of his arrival he began it himself, and, under the pretext of examining the surrounding country, he went along the highroad.

I must tell you that the little village which served as our fortress was a small collection of poor, badly built houses, which had been deserted long before. It lay on a steep slope, which terminated in a wooded plain. The country people sell the wood; they send it down the slopes, which are called *coulées*, locally, and which lead down to the plain, and there they stack it into piles, which they sell thrice a year to the wood merchants. The spot where this market is held is indicated by two small houses by the side of the highroad, which serve for public houses. The captain had gone down there by way of one of these *coulées*.

He had been gone about half an hour, and we were on the lookout at the top of the ravine, when we heard a shot. The Captain had ordered us not

to stir, and only to come to him when we heard him blow his trumpet. It was made of a goat's horn, and could be heard a league off; but it gave no sound, and, in spite of our cruel anxiety, we were obliged to wait in silence, with our rifles by our side.

It is nothing to go down these *coulées;* one just lets one's self slide down; but it is more difficult to get up again; one has to scramble up by catching hold of the hanging branches of the trees, and sometimes on all fours, by sheer strength. A whole mortal hour passed, and he did not come; nothing moved in the brushwood. The Captain's wife began to grow impatient. What could he be doing? Why did he not call us? Did the shot that we had heard proceed from an enemy, and had he killed or wounded our leader, her husband? They did not know what to think, but I myself fancied either that he was dead or that his enterprise was successful; and I was merely anxious and curious to know what he had done.

Suddenly we heard the sound of his trumpet, and we were much surprised that instead of coming from below, as we had expected, it came from the village behind us. What did that mean? It was a mystery to us, but the same idea struck us all, that he had been killed, and that the Prussians were blowing the trumpet to draw us into an ambush. We therefore returned to the cottage, keeping a careful lookout, with our fingers on the trigger, and hiding under the branches; but his wife, in spite of our entreaties, rushed on, leaping like a tigress. She thought that she had to avenge her husband, and had fixed the bayonet to her rifle, and we lost sight of her at the moment that we heard

the trumpet again; and, a few moments later, we heard her calling out to us:

"Come on! come on! He is alive! It is he!"

We hastened on, and saw the Captain smoking his pipe at the entrance of the village, but strangely enough he was on horseback.

"Ah! ah!" he said to us, "you see that there is something to be done here. Here I am on horseback already; I knocked over an uhlan yonder, and took his horse; I suppose they were guarding the wood, but it was by drinking and swilling in clover. One of them, the sentry at the door, had not time to see me before I gave him a sugarplum in his stomach, and then, before the others could come out, I jumped upon the horse and was off like a shot. Eight or ten of them followed me, I think; but I took the crossroads through the woods. I have got scratched and torn a bit, but here I am, and now, my good fellows, attention, and take care! Those brigands will not rest until they have caught us, and we must receive them with rifle bullets. Come along; let us take up our posts!"

We set out. One of us took up his position a good way from the village of the crossroads; I was posted at the entrance of the main street, where the road from the level country enters the village, while the two others, the Captain and his wife, were in the middle of the village, near the church, whose tower served for an observatory and citadel.

We had not been in our places long before we heard a shot, followed by another, and then two, then three. The first was evidently a *chassepot*—one recognized it by the sharp report, which sounds like the crack of a whip—while the other three came from the lancers' carbines.

The Captain was furious. He had given orders to the outpost to let the enemy pass and merely to follow them at a distance if they marched toward the village, and to join me when they had gone well between the houses. Then they were to appear suddenly, take the patrol between two fires, and not allow a single man to escape; for, posted as we were, the six of us could have hemmed in ten Prussians, if needful.

"That confounded Piédelot has roused them," the Captain said, "and they will not venture to come on blindfold any longer. And then I am quite sure that he has managed to get a shot into himself somewhere or other, for we hear nothing of him. It serves him right; why did he not obey orders?" And then, after a moment, he grumbled in his beard: "After all, I am sorry for the poor fellow; he is so brave, and shoots so well!"

The Captain was right in his conjectures. We waited until evening, without seeing the uhlans; they had retreated after the first attack; but unfortunately we had not seen Piédelot, either. Was he dead or a prisoner? When night came, the Captain proposed that we should go out and look for him, and so the three of us started. At the cross-roads we found a broken rifle and some blood, while the ground was trampled down; but we did not find either a wounded man or a dead body, although we searched every thicket, and at midnight we returned without having discovered anything of our unfortunate comrade.

"It is very strange," the Captain growled. "They must have killed him and thrown him into the bushes somewhere; they cannot possibly have taken him prisoner, as he would have called out for

help. I cannot understand it all." Just as he said that, bright red flames shot up in the direction of the inn on the highroad, which illuminated the sky.

"Scoundrels! cowards!" he shouted. "I will bet that they have set fire to the two houses on the marketplace, in order to have their revenge, and then they will scuttle off without saying a word. They will be satisfied with having killed a man and set fire to two houses. All right. It shall not pass over like that. We must go for them; they will not like to leave their illuminations in order to fight."

"It would be a great stroke of luck if we could set Piédelot free at the same time," some one said.

The five of us set off, full of rage and hope. In twenty minutes we had got to the bottom of the *coulée,* and had not yet seen any one when we were within a hundred yards of the inn. The fire was behind the house, and all we saw of it was the reflection above the roof. However, we were walking rather slowly, as we were afraid of an ambush, when suddenly we heard Piédelot's well-known voice. It had a strange sound, however; for it was at the same time dull and vibrating, stifled and clear, as if he were calling out as loud as he could with a bit of rag stuffed into his mouth. He seemed to be hoarse and panting, and the unlucky fellow kept exclaiming: "Help! Help!"

We sent all thoughts of prudence to the devil, and in two bounds we were at the back of the inn, where a terrible sight met our eyes.

IV

Piédelot was being burned alive. He was writhing in the midst of a heap of fagots, tied to a stake, and the flames were licking him with their burning tongues. When he saw us, his tongue seemed to stick in his throat; he drooped his head, and seemed as if he were going to die. It was only the affair of a moment to upset the burning pile, to scatter the embers, and to cut the ropes that fastened him.

Poor fellow! In what a terrible state we found him! The evening before he had had his left arm broken, and it seemed as if he had been badly beaten since then, for his whole body was covered with wounds, bruises, and blood. The flames had also begun their work on him, and he had two large burns, one on his loins and the other on his right thigh, and his beard and hair were scorched. Poor Piédelot!

No one knows the terrible rage we felt at this sight! We would have rushed headlong at a hundred thousand Prussians; our thirst for vengeance was intense. But the cowards had run away, leaving their crime behind them. Where could we find them now? Meanwhile, however, the Captain's wife was looking after Piédelot, and dressing his wounds as best she could, while the Captain himself shook hands with him excitedly, and in a few minutes he came to himself.

"Good morning, Captain; good morning, all of you," he said. "Ah! the scoundrels, the wretches! Why, twenty of them came to surprise us."

"Twenty, do you say?"

"Yes; there was a whole band of them, and that is why I disobeyed orders, Captain, and fired on them, for they would have killed you all, and I preferred to stop them. That frightened them, and they did not venture to go farther than the cross-roads. They were such cowards. Four of them shot at me at twenty yards, as if I had been a target, and then they slashed me with their swords. My arm was broken, so that I could only use my bayonet with one hand."

"But why did you not call for help?"

"I took good care not to do that, for you would all have come; and you would neither have been able to defend me nor yourselves, being only five against twenty."

"You know that we should not have allowed you to have been taken, poor old fellow."

"I preferred to die by myself, don't you see! I did not want to bring you there, for it would have been a mere ambush."

"Well, we will not talk about it any more. Do you feel rather easier?"

"No, I am suffocating. I know that I cannot live much longer. The brutes! They tied me to a tree, and beat me till I was half dead, and then they shook my broken arm; but I did not make a sound. I would rather have bitten my tongue out than have called out before them. . . . Now I can tell what I am suffering and shed tears; it does one good. Thank you, my kind friends."

"Poor Piédelot! But we will avenge you, you may be sure!"

"Yes, yes; I want you to do that. There is, in particular, a woman among them who passes as the

wife of the lancer whom the Captain killed yesterday. She is dressed like a lancer, and she tortured me the most yesterday, and suggested burning me; and it was she who set fire to the wood. Oh! the wretch, the brute. . . . Ah! how I am suffering! My loins, my arms! " and he fell back panting and exhausted, writhing in his terrible agony, while the Captain's wife wiped the perspiration from his forehead, and we all shed tears of grief and rage, as if we had been children. I will not describe the end to you; he died half an hour later, previously telling us in which direction the enemy had gone. When he was dead we gave ourselves time to bury him, and then we set out in pursuit of them, with our hearts full of fury and hatred.

" We will throw ourselves on the whole Prussian army, if it be necessary," the captain said; " but we will avenge Piédelot. We must catch those scoundrels. Let us swear to die, rather than not to find them; and if I am killed first, these are my orders: All the prisoners that you take are to be shot immediately, and as for the lancer's wife, she is to be tortured before she is put to death."

" She must not be shot, because she is a woman," the Captain's wife said. " If you survive, I am sure that you would not shoot a woman. Torturing her will be quite sufficient; but if you are killed in this pursuit, I want one thing, and that is to fight with her; I will kill her with my own hands, and the others can do what they like with her if she kills me."

" We will outrage her! We will burn her! We will tear her to pieces! Piédelot shall be avenged! An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth! "

V

The next morning we unexpectedly fell on an outpost of uhlans four leagues away. Surprised by our sudden attack, they were not able to mount their horses, nor even to defend themselves; and in a few moments we had five prisoners, corresponding to our own number. The Captain questioned them, and from their answers we felt certain that they were the same whom we had encountered the previous day. Then a very curious operation took place. One of us was told off to ascertain their sex, and nothing can describe our joy when we discovered what we were seeking among them, the female executioner who had tortured our friend.

The four others were shot on the spot, with their backs to us and close to the muzzles of our rifles; and then we turned our attention to the woman. What were we going to do with her? I must acknowledge that we were all of us in favor of shooting her. Hatred, and the wish to avenge Piédelot, had extinguished all pity in us, and we had forgotten that we were going to shoot a woman, but a woman reminded us of it, the Captain's wife; at her entreaties, therefore, we determined to keep her a prisoner.

The Captain's poor wife was to be severely punished for this act of clemency.

The next day we heard that the armistice had been extended to the eastern part of France, and we had to put an end to our little campaign. Two of us, who belonged to the neighborhood, returned

home, so there were only four of us, all told: the Captain, his wife, and two men. We belonged to Besançon, which was still being besieged in spite of the armistice.

"Let us stop here," said the Captain. "I cannot believe that the war is going to end like this. The devil take it! Surely there are men still left in France; and now is the time to prove what they are made of. The spring is coming on, and the armistice is only a trap laid for the Prussians. During the time that it lasts, a new army will be raised, and some fine morning we shall fall upon them again. We shall be ready, and we have a hostage—let us remain here."

We fixed our quarters there. It was terribly cold, and we did not go out much, and somebody had always to keep the female prisoner in sight.

She was sullen, and never said anything, or else spoke of her husband, whom the Captain had killed. She looked at him continually with fierce eyes, and we felt that she was tortured by a wild longing for revenge. That seemed to us to be the most suitable punishment for the terrible torments that she had made Piédelot suffer, for impotent vengeance is such intense pain!

Alas! we who knew how to avenge our comrade ought to have thought that this woman would know how to avenge her husband, and have been on our guard. It is true that one of us kept watch every night, and that at first we tied her by a long rope to the great oak bench that was fastened to the wall. But, by and by, as she had never tried to escape, in spite of her hatred for us, we relaxed our extreme prudence, and allowed her to sleep somewhere else except on the bench, and without being

tied. What had we to fear? She was at the end of the room, a man was on guard at the door, and between her and the sentinel the Captain's wife and two other men used to lie. She was alone and unarmed against four, so there could be no danger.

One night when we were asleep, and the Captain was on guard, the lancer's wife was lying more quietly in her corner than usual, and she had even smiled for the first time since she had been our prisoner during the evening. Suddenly, however, in the middle of the night, we were all awakened by a terrible cry. We got up, groping about, and at once stumbled over a furious couple who were rolling about and fighting on the ground. It was the Captain and the lancer's wife. We threw ourselves on them, and separated them in a moment. She was shouting and laughing, and he seemed to have the death rattle. All this took place in the dark. Two of us held her, and when a light was struck a terrible sight met our eyes. The Captain was lying on the floor in a pool of blood, with an enormous gash in his throat, and his sword bayonet, that had been taken from his rifle, was sticking in the red, gaping wound. A few minutes afterward he died, without having been able to utter a word.

His wife did not shed a tear. Her eyes were dry, her throat was contracted, and she looked at the lancer's wife steadfastly, and with a calm ferocity that inspired fear.

"This woman belongs to me," she said to us suddenly. "You swore to me not a week ago to let me kill her as I chose, if she killed my husband; and you must keep your oath. You must fasten her securely to the fireplace, upright against the back of it, and then you can go where you like, but far from

here. I will take my revenge on her myself. Leave the Captain's body, and we three, he, she, and I, will remain here."

We obeyed, and went away. She promised to write to us to Geneva, as we were returning thither.

VI

Two days later I received the following letter, dated the day after we had left, and that had been written at an inn on the highroad:

"My Friend: I am writing to you, according to my promise. For the moment I am at the inn, where I have just handed my prisoner over to a Prussian officer.

"I must tell you, my friend, that this poor woman has left two children in Germany. She had followed her husband, whom she adored, as she did not wish him to be exposed to the risks of war by himself, and as her children were with their grandparents. I have learned all this since yesterday, and it has turned my ideas of vengeance into more humane feelings. At the very moment when I felt pleasure in insulting this woman, and in threatening her with the most fearful torments, in recalling Piédelot, who had been burned alive, and in threatening her with a similar death, she looked at me coldly, and said:

"'What have you got to reproach me with, Frenchwoman? You think that you will do right in avenging your husband's death, is not that so?'

"'Yes,' I replied.

"'Very well, then; in killing him, I did what you are going to do in burning me. I avenged my husband, for your husband killed him.'

"'Well,' I replied, 'as you approve of this vengeance, prepare to endure it.'

"'I do not fear it.'

"And in fact she did not seem to have lost courage. Her face was calm, and she looked at me without trembling, while I brought wood and dried leaves together, and feverishly threw on to them the powder from some cartridges, which was to make her funeral pile the more cruel.

"I hesitated in my thoughts of persecution for a moment. But the captain was there, pale and covered with blood, and he seemed to be looking at me with his large, glassy eyes, and I applied myself to my work again after kissing his pale lips. Suddenly, however, on raising my head, I saw that she was crying, and I felt rather surprised.

"'So you are frightened?' I said to her.

"'No, but when I saw you kiss your husband, I thought of mine, of all whom I love.'

"She continued to sob, but stopping suddenly she said to me in broken words and in a low voice:

"'Have you any children?'

"A shiver ran over me, for I guessed that this poor woman had some. She asked me to look in a pocketbook which was in her bosom, and in it I saw two photographs of quite young children, a boy and a girl, with those kind, gentle, chubby faces that German children have. In it there were also two locks of light hair and a letter in a large, childish hand, and beginning with German words which meant: 'My dear little mother.'

"I could not restrain my tears, my dear friend, and so I untied her, and without venturing to look at the face of my poor dead husband, who was not to be avenged, I went with her as far as the inn. She is free; I have just left her, and she kissed me with tears. I am going upstairs to my husband; come as soon as possible, my dear friend, to look for our two bodies."

I set off with all speed, and when I arrived there was a Prussian patrol at the cottage; and when I asked what it all meant I was told that there was a captain of *franc-tireurs* and his wife inside, both dead. I gave their names; they saw that I knew them, and I begged to be allowed to arrange their funeral.

"Somebody has already undertaken it," was the reply. "Go in if you wish to, as you know them. You can settle about their funeral with their friend."

I went in. The Captain and his wife were lying side by side on a bed, and were covered by a sheet. I raised it, and saw that the woman had inflicted a wound in her throat similar to that from which her husband had died.

At the side of the bed there sat, watching and weeping, the woman who had been mentioned to me as their best friend. It was the lancer's wife.

A NEW YEAR'S GIFT

HAVING dined at home alone, Jacques de Randal told his valet he might go out, and he sat down at his table to write some letters.

He ended every year in this manner, writing and dreaming. He reviewed the events of his life since last New Year's Day, things that were now all over and dead; and, in proportion as the faces of his friends rose up before his eyes, he wrote them a few lines, a cordial New Year's greeting on the first of January.

So he sat down, opened a drawer, took out of it a woman's photograph, gazed at it a few moments, and kissed it. Then, having laid it beside a sheet of notepaper, he began:

"My Dear Irene: You must by this time have received the little souvenir I sent you addressed to the maid. I have shut myself up this evening in order to tell you. . . ."

The pen here ceased to move. Jacques rose up and began walking up and down the room.

For the last ten months he had had a sweetheart, not like the others, a woman with whom one engages in a passing intrigue, of the theatrical world or the *demi-monde,* but a woman whom he loved and won. He was no longer a young man, although he was still comparatively young for a man, and he looked on life seriously in a positive and practical spirit.

Accordingly, he drew up the balance sheet of his passion, as he drew up every year the balance sheet of friendships that were ended or freshly contracted, of circumstances and persons that had entered into his life.

His first ardor of love having grown calmer, he asked himself with the precision of a merchant making a calculation what was the state of his heart with regard to her, and he tried to form an idea of what it would be in the future.

He found there a great and deep affection, made up of tenderness, gratitude, and the thousand subtle ties which give birth to long and powerful attachments.

A ring at the bell made him start. He hesitated. Should he open the door? But he said to himself that one must always open the door on New Year's night, to admit the Unknown who is passing by and knocks, no matter who it may be.

So he took a wax candle, passed through the antechamber, drew back the bolts, turned the key, pulled the door back, and saw his sweetheart standing pale as a corpse, leaning against the wall.

He stammered:

"What is the matter with you?"

She replied:

"Are you alone?"

"Yes."

"Without servants?"

"Yes."

"You are not going out?"

"No."

She entered with the air of a woman who knew the house. As soon as she was in the drawing-room, she sank down on the sofa, and, covering her face with her hands, began to weep bitterly.

He knelt down at her feet, and tried to remove her hands from her eyes, so that he might look at them, and exclaimed:

"Irene, Irene, what is the matter with you? I implore you to tell me what is the matter with you?"

Then, amid her sobs, she murmured:

"I can no longer live like this."

He did not understand.

"Live like this? What do you mean? . . ."

"Yes. I can no longer live like this. . . . I have endured so much. . . . He struck me this afternoon."

"Who? Your husband?"

"Yes, my husband."

"Ah!"

He was astonished, having never suspected that her husband could be brutal. He was a man of the world, of the better class, a clubman, a lover of horses, a theatergoer, and an expert swordsman; he was known, talked about, appreciated everywhere, having very courteous manners, a very mediocre intellect, an absence of education and of the real culture needed in order to think like all well-bred people, and finally a respect for conventionalities.

He appeared to devote himself to his wife, as a man ought to do in the case of wealthy and well-bred people. He displayed enough of anxiety about her wishes, her health, her dresses, and, beyond that, left her perfectly free.

Randal, having become Irene's friend, had a right to the affectionate hand-clasp which every husband endowed with good manners owes to his wife's intimate acquaintance. Then, when Jacques, after having been for some time the friend, became the lover, his relations with the husband were more cordial, as is fitting.

Jacques had never dreamed that there were storms in this household, and he was bewildered at this unexpected revelation.

He asked:

"How did it happen? Tell me."

Thereupon she related a long story, the entire history of her life since the day of her marriage, the first disagreement arising out of a mere nothing, then becoming accentuated at every new difference of opinion between two dissimilar dispositions.

Then came quarrels, a complete separation, not apparent, but real; next, her husband showed himself aggressive, suspicious, violent. Now, he was jealous, jealous of Jacques, and that very day, after a scene, he had struck her.

She added with decision: "I will not go back to him. Do with me what you like."

Jacques sat down opposite to her, their knees touching. He took her hands:

"My dear love, you are going to commit a gross, an irreparable folly. If you want to leave your husband, put him in the wrong, so that your position as a woman of the world may be saved."

She asked, as she looked at him uneasily:

"Then, what do you advise me?"

"To go back home and to put up with your life there till the day when you can obtain either a separation or a divorce, with the honors of war."

"Is not this thing which you advise me to do a little cowardly?"

"No; it is wise and sensible. You have a high position, a reputation to protect, friends to preserve, and relations to deal with. You must not lose all these through a mere caprice."

She rose up, and said with violence:

"Well, no! I cannot stand it any longer! It is at an end! it is at an end!"

Then, placing her two hands on her lover's shoulders, and looking him straight in the face, she asked:

"Do you love me?"

"Yes."

"Really and truly?"

"Yes."

"Then take care of me."

He exclaimed:

"Take care of you? In my own house? Here? Why, you are mad. It would mean losing you for ever; losing you beyond hope of recall! You are mad!"

She replied, slowly and seriously, like a woman who feels the weight of her words:

"Listen, Jacques. He has forbidden me to see you again, and I will not play this comedy of coming secretly to your house. You must either lose me or take me."

"My dear Irene, in that case, obtain your divorce, and I will marry you."

"Yes, you will marry me in—two years at the soonest. Yours is a patient love."

"Look here! Reflect! If you remain here he'll come to-morrow to take you away, seeing that he is your husband, seeing that he has right and law on his side."

"I did not ask you to keep me in your own house, Jacques, but to take me anywhere you like. I thought you loved me enough to do that. I have made a mistake. Good-by!"

She turned round and went toward the door so quickly that he was only able to catch hold of her when she was outside the room:

"Listen, Irene."

She struggled, and would not listen to him. Her eyes were full of tears, and she stammered:

"Let me alone! let me alone! let me alone!"

He made her sit down by force, and once more falling on his knees at her feet, he now brought forward a number of arguments and counsels to make her understand the folly and terrible risk of her project. He omitted nothing which he deemed necessary to convince her, finding even in his very affection for her incentives to persuasion.

As she remained silent and cold as ice, he begged of her, implored of her to listen to him, to trust him, to follow his advice.

When he had finished speaking, she only replied:

"Are you disposed to let me go away now? Take away your hands, so that I may rise to my feet."

"Look here, Irene."

"Will you let me go?"

"Irene . . . is your resolution irrevocable?"

"Will you let me go?"

"Tell me only whether this resolution, this mad resolution of yours, which you will bitterly regret, is irrevocable?"

"Yes . . . let me go!"

"Then stay. You know well that you are at home here. We shall go away to-morrow morning."

She rose to her feet in spite of him, and said in a hard tone:

"No. It is too late. I do not want sacrifice; I do not want devotion."

"Stay! I have done what I ought to do; I have said what I ought to say. I have no further responsibility on your behalf. My conscience is at peace. Tell me what you want me to do, and I will obey."

She resumed her seat, looked at him for a long time, and then asked, in a very calm voice:

"Well, then, explain."

"Explain what? What do you wish me to explain?"

"Everything—everything that you thought about before changing your mind. Then I will see what I ought to do."

"But I thought about nothing at all. I had to warn you that you were going to commit an act of folly. You persist; then I ask to share in this act of folly, and I even insist on it."

"It is not natural to change one's mind so quickly."

"Listen, my dear love. It is not a question here of sacrifice or devotion. On the day when I realized that I loved you, I said to myself what every lover ought to say to himself in the same case: 'The man who loves a woman, who makes an effort to

win her, who gets her, and who takes her, enters into a sacred contract with himself and with her. That is, of course, in dealing with a woman like you, not a woman with a fickle heart and easily impressed.'

" Marriage, which has a great social value, a great legal value, possesses in my eyes only a very slight moral value, taking into account the conditions under which it generally takes place.

" Therefore, when a woman, united by this lawful bond, but having no attachment to her husband, whom she cannot love, a woman whose heart is free, meets a man whom she cares for, and gives herself to him, when a man who has no other tie, takes a woman in this way, I say that they pledge themselves toward each other by this mutual and free agreement much more than by the ' Yes ' uttered in the presence of the Mayor.

" I say that, if they are both honorable persons, their union must be more intimate, more real, more healthy, than if the sacraments had consecrated it.

" This woman risks everything. And it is exactly because she knows it, because she gives everything, her heart, her body, her soul, her honor, her life, because she has foreseen all miseries, all dangers, all catastrophes, because she dares to do a bold act, an intrepid act, because she is prepared, determined to brave everything—her husband, who might kill her, and society, which may cast her out. This is why she is worthy of respect in the midst of her conjugal infidelity; this is why her lover, in taking her, should also foresee everything, and prefer her to every one else whatever may happen. I have nothing more to say. I spoke in the beginning like a sensible man whose duty it was to warn

you; and now I am only a man—a man who loves you. Command, and I obey."

Radiant, she closed his mouth with a kiss, and said in a low tone:

"It is not true, darling! There is nothing the matter! My husband does not suspect anything. But I wanted to see, I wanted to know, what you would do. I wished for a New Year's gift—the gift of your heart—another gift besides the necklace you sent me. You have given it to me. Thanks! thanks! . . . God be thanked for the happiness you have given me!"

ONE EVENING

THE steamboat *Kleber* had stopped, and I was enraptured with the beautiful Bay of Bougie, that spread out before us. The Kabyle Mountains were covered with forests, and in the distance the yellow sands formed a beach of powdered gold while the sun shed its fiery rays on the white houses of the town.

The warm African breeze wafted the odor of the desert, the odor of that great, mysterious continent into which men of the Northern races but rarely penetrate, into my face. For three months I had been wandering on the borders of that great, unknown world, on the outskirts of that strange world of the ostrich, the camel, the gazelle, the hippopotamus, the gorilla, the lion, the tiger, and the negro. I had seen the Arab galloping in the wind, like a waving standard, and I had slept under those brown tents, the moving

habitation of those white birds of the desert, and I felt, as it were, intoxicated with light, with imagination, and with space.

But now, after this final excursion, I should have to leave, to return to France and to Paris, that city of useless chatter, of commonplace cares, and of continual hand-shaking, and I should bid adieu to all that I had grown to love, all that was so new to me, that I had scarcely had time to see thoroughly, and that I should so much regret.

A fleet of small boats surrounded the steamer, and, jumping into one rowed by a negro lad, I soon reached the quay near the old Saracen gate, whose gray ruins at the entrance of the Kabyle town looked like an old escutcheon of nobility. While I was standing by the side of my portmanteau, looking at the great steamer lying at anchor in the roads, and filled with admiration at that unique coast and that semicircle of hills washed by the blue waves, which were more beautiful than Naples and as fine as those of Ajaccio or of Porto, in Corsica, a heavy hand was laid on my shoulder, and on turning round I saw standing beside me a tall man with a long beard. He was dressed in white flannels and wore a straw hat, and was looking at me with his blue eyes.

"Are you not an old schoolmate of mine?" he said.

"It is very possible. What is your name?"

"Trémoulin."

"By Jove! You were in the same class with me."

"Ah! Old fellow, I recognized you immediately."

He seemed so pleased, so happy at seeing me,

that, in an outburst of friendly egotism, I shook both the hands of my former schoolfellow heartily, and felt very pleased at meeting him thus.

For four years Trémoulin had been one of my best and most intimate friends, one of those whom we are too apt to forget as soon as we leave college. In those days he had been a tall, thin fellow, whose head seemed too heavy for his body; it was a large, round head, and bent his neck sometimes to the right and sometimes to the left, looking top-heavy for the narrow-chested, long-legged collegian. Trémoulin was very clever, however, with a rare suppleness and versatility of mind, and an instinctive intuition for all literary studies, and he won nearly all the prizes in our class.

We were fully convinced at school that he would turn out a celebrated man, a poet, no doubt, for he wrote verses, and was full of ingeniously sentimental ideas. His father, who kept a chemist's shop near the Pantheon, was not supposed to be very well off, and I had lost sight of him as soon as he had taken his Bachelor's degree, and now I naturally asked him what he was doing there.

"I am a planter," he replied.

"Bah! You really plant?"

"And I gather in my harvest."

"What is it?"

"Grapes, from which I make wine."

"Is your wine-growing a success?"

"A great success."

"So much the better, old fellow."

"Were you going to the hotel?"

"Of course I was."

"Well, then, you must just come home with me instead."

"But! . . ."

"The matter is settled."

And he said to the young negro who was watching our movements: "Take that home, Ali."

The lad put my portmanteau on his shoulder and set off, raising the dust with his black feet, while Trémoulin took my arm and led me off. First of all, he asked me about my journey and what impressions it had made on me, and, seeing how enthusiastic I was about it, he seemed to like me better than ever. He lived in an old Moorish house, with an interior courtyard, without any windows looking into the street, and commanded by a terrace, which, in its turn, commanded those of the neighboring houses, as well as the bay and the forests, the hill and the open sea, and I could not help exclaiming:

"Ah! This is what I like; the whole of the East lays hold of me in this place. You are indeed lucky to be living here! What nights you must spend upon that terrace! Do you sleep there?"

"Yes, in the summer. We will go up to it this evening. Are you fond of fishing?"

"What kind of fishing?"

"Fishing by torchlight."

"Yes, I am particularly fond of it."

"Very well, then, we will go after dinner, and then come back and drink sherbet on my roof."

After I had had a bath, he took me to see the charming Kabyle town, a veritable cascade of white houses toppling down to the sea, and as it grew dusk we went in, and after a delicious dinner, went down to the quay. Nothing was to be seen but the lights in the streets and the stars, those large, bright, scintillating African stars. A boat was

waiting for us, and as soon as we got in, a man whose face I could not distinguish began to row, while my friend was getting ready the brazier which he would light later, and he said to me: "You know I am an expert in spearing fish; no one understands it better than I."

"Allow me to compliment you on your skill." We had rowed round a kind of mole, and now we were in a small bay full of high rocks, whose shadows looked like towers built in the water, and I suddenly perceived that the sea was phosphorescent, and as the oars moved gently, they seemed to light up, a weird moving flame, that followed in our wake, and then died out. I leaned over the side of the boat and watched it, as we glided over that glimmer in the darkness.

Where were we going to? I could not see my neighbors; in fact, I could see nothing but the luminous ripple and the sparks of water dropping from the oars; it was hot, very hot, and the darkness seemed as hot as a furnace, and this mysterious voyage with these two men in that silent boat had a peculiar effect upon me.

Suddenly the rower stopped. Where were we? I heard a slight scratching sound close to me, and saw a hand, nothing but a hand, applying a lighted match to the iron grating fastening in the bows of the boat, which was covered with wood, as if it had been a floating funeral pyre, and which soon was blazing brightly and lighting up the boat and the two men, an old, thin, pale, wrinkled sailor, with a pocket-handkerchief tied round his head, instead of a cap, and Trémoulin, whose fair beard glistened in the light.

"Go on," he said, and the other began to row

again, while Trémoulin kept throwing wood on the brazier, which burned red and brightly. I leaned over the side again, and could see the bottom, and a few feet below us there was that strange country of the water, which gives life to plants and animals, just as the air of heaven does. Trémoulin, who was standing in the bows with his body bent forward, and holding the sharp-pointed trident called a spearing hook in his hand, was on the lookout, with the ardent gaze of a beast of prey watching for its spoil, and, suddenly, with a swift movement, he darted his weapon into the sea so vigorously that it secured a large fish swimming near the bottom. It was a conger eel, which managed to wriggle, half dead as it was, into a puddle of the brackish water in the boat.

Trémoulin again threw his spear, and when he pulled it up, I saw a great lump of red flesh which palpitated, moved, rolled and unrolled long, strong, soft feelers round the handle of the trident. It was an octopus, and Trémoulin opened his knife, and with a swift movement plunged it between the eyes, and killed it. And so our fishing continued, until the wood began to run short. When there was not enough left to keep up the fire, Trémoulin dipped the braziers into the sea, and we were again buried in darkness.

The old sailor began to row again, slowly and regularly, though I could not tell where the land or where the port was. By and by, however, I saw lights. We were nearing the harbor.

"Are you sleepy?" my friend said to me.

"Not in the least."

"Then we will go and have a chat on the roof."

"I shall be delighted."

Just as we got on the terrace I saw the crescent moon rising behind the mountains, and around us, the white houses, with their flat roofs, descended toward the sea, while human forms were standing or lying on them, sleeping or dreaming under the stars; whole families wrapped in long flannel garments, and resting in the calm night, after the heat of the day.

It suddenly seemed to me as if the Eastern mind were taking possession of me, the poetical and legendary spirit of a simple people with poetical minds. My head was full of the Bible and of *The Arabian Nights;* I could hear the prophets proclaiming miracles, and I could see princesses in flowing silk bloomers on the terraces of the palaces, while delicate incense burned in silver dishes, the smoke as it arose taking the form of genii. I said to Trémoulin:

"You are very fortunate to live here."

"I came here quite by accident," he replied.

"By accident?"

"Yes, accident and unhappiness brought me here."

"You have been unhappy?"

"Very unhappy."

He was standing in front of me, wrapped in his burnous, and his voice had such a mournful ring that it almost made me shiver; after a moment's silence, however, he continued:

"I will tell you what my sorrow was; perhaps it will do me good to speak about it."

"Let me hear it."

"Do you really wish it?"

"Yes."

"Very well, then. You remember me at col-

lege, a sort of poet, brought up in a chemist's shop. I dreamed of writing books, and tried it, after taking my degree, but I did not succeed. I published a volume of verse, and then a novel, and neither of them sold, and then I wrote a play, which was never acted.

"Next, I lost my heart, but I will not give you an account of my passion. Next door to my father's shop there was a tailor, who had a daughter, with whom I fell in love. She was very clever, and had obtained her diplomas for higher studies, and her mind was bright and active, quite in keeping indeed with her body. She might have been taken for fifteen, although she was two-and-twenty. She was very small, with delicate features, outlines and tints, just like some beautiful water color. Her nose, her mouth, her blue eyes, her light hair, her smile, her waist, her hands, all looked as if they were fit for a stained-glass window, and not for everyday life, but she was lively, supple, and incredibly active, and I was very much in love with her. I remember two or three walks in the Luxembourg Garden, near the Médici fountain, which were certainly the happiest hours of my life. I suppose you have known that strange condition of tender madness which causes us to think of nothing but of acts of adoration! One really becomes possessed, haunted by a woman, and nothing exists for us except herself.

"We soon became engaged, and I told her my projects for the future, of which she did not approve. She did not believe that I was either a poet, a novelist, or a dramatic author, and thought a prosperous business could afford perfect happiness. So I gave up the idea of writing books, and

resigned myself to selling them, and I bought a bookseller's business at Marseilles, the owner of which had just died.

"I had three very prosperous years. We had made our shop into a sort of literary drawing-room, where all the men of letters in the town used to come and chat. They came in, as if it had been a club, and exchanged ideas on books, on poets, and especially on politics. My wife, who took a very active part in the business, enjoyed quite a reputation in the town, but, as for me, while they were all talking downstairs, I was working in my studio upstairs, which communicated with the shop by a winding staircase. I could hear their voices, their laughter, and their discussions, and sometimes I left off writing in order to listen. I kept in my own room to write a novel—which I never finished.

"The most regular frequenters of the shop were Monsieur Montina, a man of good private means, a tall, handsome man, such as one meets in the South of France, with an olive skin and dark, expressive eyes; Monsieur Barbet, a magistrate; two merchants, who were partners, Messrs. Faucil and Labarrègue, and General the Marquis de la Flèche, the head of the Royalist party, the principal man in the whole district, an old fellow of sixty-six.

"My business prospered, and I was happy, very happy. One day, however, about three o'clock, when I was out on business, as I was going through the Rue Saint-Ferréol, I suddenly saw coming out of a house a woman whose figure and appearance were so much like my wife's that I should have said to myself: 'It is she!' if I had not left her in the shop half an hour before, suffering from a headache. She was walking quickly on before me,

without turning round, and, in spite of myself, I followed her, as I felt surprised and uneasy. I said to myself: 'It is she; no, it is quite impossible, as she has a sick headache. And then, what could she have to do in that house?' However, as I wished to have the matter cleared up, I hurried after her. I do not know whether she felt or guessed that I was behind her, or whether she recognized my step, but she turned round suddenly. It was she! When she saw me, she grew very red and stopped, and then, with a smile, she said: 'Oh! Here you are!' I felt choking.

"'Yes; so you have come out? And how is your headache?'

"'It is better, and I have been out on an errand.'

"'Where?'

"'To Lacaussade's, in the Rue Cassinelli, to order some pencils.'

"She looked me full in the face. She was not flushed now, but rather pale, on the contrary. Her clear, limpid eyes—ah! those women's eyes!—appeared to be full of truth, but I felt vaguely and painfully that they were full of lies. I was much more confused and embarrassed than she was herself, without venturing to suspect anything, but quite convinced that she was lying, though I did not know why, and so I merely said:

"'You were quite right to go out, if you felt better.'

"'Oh! yes; my head is much better.'

"'Are you going home?'

"'Yes, of course I am.'

"I left her, and wandered about the streets by myself. What was going on? While I was talk-

ing to her I had an intuitive feeling of her falseness, but now I could not believe it, and when I returned home to dinner I was angry for having suspected her, even for a moment.

" Have you ever been jealous? It does not matter whether you have or not, but the first drop of jealousy had fallen into my heart, and that is always like a spark of fire. I did not formulate anything, and I did not believe anything, I only knew that she had lied. You must remember that every night, after the customers and clerks had left and we were alone, we would either stroll as far as the harbor when it was fine, or remain talking in my office, if the weather was bad; and I would open my heart to her without any reserve, because I loved her. She was part of my life, the greater part, and all my happiness, and in her small hands she held my trusting, faithful, devoted heart captive.

" During the first days, those days of doubt, and before my suspicions increased and assumed a shape, I felt as depressed and chilly as one does before becoming seriously ill. I was continually cold, really cold, and could neither eat nor sleep. Why had she told me a lie? What was she doing in that house? I went there, to try and find out something, but could discover nothing. The man who rented the first floor, and who was an upholsterer, had told me all about his neighbors, but without helping me the least. A midwife lived on the second floor, a dressmaker and a manicure and chiropodist on the third, and two coachmen and their families in the attics.

" Why had she told me a lie? It would have been so easy for her to have said that she had been

to the dressmaker or the chiropodist. Oh, how I longed to question them, also! I did not say so, for fear that she might guess my suspicions. One thing, however, was certain; she had been into that house, and had concealed the fact from me, so there was some mystery in it. But what? At one moment I thought there might be some laudable purpose in it, some charitable deed that she wished to hide, some information which she wished to obtain, and I found fault with myself for suspecting her. Have not all of us the right to our little, innocent secrets, a kind of second, interior life, for which we are not responsible to anybody? Can a man, because he has taken a girl to be his companion through life, demand that she shall neither think nor do anything without telling him in advance, or afterward? Does the word marriage mean renouncing all liberty and independence? Was it not quite possible that she was going to the dressmaker's without telling me, or that she was going to aid the family of one of the coachmen? Or she might have thought that I would criticise her visit to the house without blaming her. She knew me thoroughly, all my slightest peculiarities, and perhaps she feared a discussion, even if she did not think that I should find fault with her. She had very pretty hands, and I ended by supposing that she was having them secretly attended to by the manicure in the house which I suspected, and that she did not tell me of it, for fear that I should think her extravagant. She was very methodical and economical, and looked after all her household duties most carefully, and no doubt she thought that she should lower herself in my eyes were she to confess that slight piece of feminine extravagance.

Women have so many subtleties and innate tricks in their souls!

"But none of my reasoning reassured me. I was jealous; my suspicions were affecting me terribly; I was becoming a prey to them. I cherished secret grief and anguish; a thought as yet veiled, which I dared not uncover, for beneath it I should find a terrible doubt. . . . A lover! . . . Had she not a lover? . . . It was unlikely, impossible . . . and yet? . . .

"I continually saw Montina's face before my eyes. I saw the tall, silly-looking, handsome man, with his bright hair, smiling into her face, and I said to myself: 'It is he.' I concocted a story of their intrigues. They had talked a book over together, had discussed the love adventures it contained, had found something in it that resembled them, and had turned that analogy into reality. And so I watched them, a prey to the most terrible sufferings that a man can endure. I bought shoes with rubber soles, so that I might be able to move about the house noiselessly, and I spent half my time in going up and down my little spiral staircase, in the hope of surprising them, but I always found that the clerk was with them.

"I lived in a state of continual suffering. I could no longer work nor attend to my business. When I went out, as soon as I had walked a hundred yards along the street, I said to myself: 'He is there!' When I found he was not there, I went out again, but returned almost immediately, thinking: 'He is there now!' and that went on every day.

"At night it was still worse, for I felt her by my side in bed asleep, or pretending to be asleep!

Was she really sleeping? No, most likely not. Was that another lie?

"I remained motionless on my back, burning from the warmth of her body, tormented, breathing hard. Oh! how intensely I longed to get up, to get a hammer and split her head open, so as to look inside it! I knew that I should see nothing but what is to be found in every head, and I should have discovered nothing, for that would be impossible. And her eyes! When she looked at me, I felt an access of fury. I looked at her . . . she looked at me! Her eyes were transparent, candid . . . and false, false! No one could tell what she was thinking of, and I felt inclined to run pins into them, and to destroy those mirrors of falsity.

"Ah! how well I understood the Inquisition! I would have applied the torture, the boot . . . Speak! . . . Confess! . . . You will not . . . Then wait! . . . And I would have strangled her by degrees to make her confess and have watched her die. . . . Or else I would have held her fingers in the fire. . . . Oh! how I should have enjoyed doing it! . . . Confess! . . . Confess! . . . You will not? I would have held them on the coals, and when the tips were burned, she would have confessed . . . surely she would have confessed!"

Trémoulin was sitting up, shouting, with clinched fists. Around us, on the neighboring roofs, people awoke and sat up, aroused from their sleep. As for me, I was moved and powerfully interested, and in the darkness I could see that little woman, that little, fair, lively, artful woman, as if I had known her personally. I saw her selling her books, talking with the men whom her childish ways attracted, and

in her delicate, doll-like head I could see little crafty ideas, silly ideas, the dreams of a milliner perfumed with musk, who is attracted by all heroes or romantic adventurers. I suspected her just as he did, I hated and detested her, and would willingly have burned her fingers to make her confess.

Presently he continued more calmly: "I do not know why I have told you all this, for I have never mentioned it to any one, but then I have not seen anybody or spoken to anybody for two years! And it was seething in my heart like fermenting wine. I have rid myself of it, and so much the worse for you. Well, I had made a mistake, but it was worse than I thought, much worse. Just listen. I employed the means a man always employs under such circumstances, and pretended that I was going to be away from home. Whenever I did this my wife went out to luncheon. I need not tell you how I bribed a waiter in the restaurant to which they used to go, so that I might surprise them.

"He was to open the door of their private room for me, and I arrived at the appointed time, with the fixed determination of killing them both. I could imagine the whole scene, just as if it had already occurred! I could see myself going in. A small table covered with glasses, bottles, and plates separated her from Montina, and they would be so surprised when they saw me that they would not even attempt to move; and, without a word, I should bring down the loaded stick which I had in my hand on the man's head. Killed by one blow, he would fall with his head face downward on the table. Then, turning toward her, I should give her time—a few moments—to understand it all and to stretch out her arms toward me, mad with terror, before

dying in her turn. Oh! I was ready, strong, determined, and pleased, madly pleased at the idea. The idea of her terrified look at the sight of my raised stick, of her hands stretched out imploringly, of her strangled cry, of her face, suddenly livid and convulsed, avenged me beforehand. I would not kill her at one blow! You will think me cruel, I dare say; but you do not know what a man suffers. To think that a woman one loves, whether she be wife or sweetheart, gives herself to another, yields herself up to him as she does to you, and receives kisses from his lips as she does from yours! It is a terrible, an atrocious thing to think of. When one feels that torture, one is ready for anything. I only wonder that more women are not murdered, for every man who has been deceived longs to commit murder, has dreamed of it in the solitude of his own room or on a lonely road, and has been haunted by the one fixed idea of satisfied vengeance.

"I arrived at the restaurant and asked whether they were there. The waiter whom I had bribed replied: 'Yes, Monsieur,' and taking me upstairs, he pointed to a door, and said: 'That is the room!' I grasped my stick, as if my fingers had been made of iron, and went in. I had chosen a most appropriate moment, for they were kissing most lovingly. But it was not Montina, it was General de la Flèche, who was sixty-six years old, and I had so fully made up my mind that I should find the other one there that I was motionless from astonishment.

"And then . . . and then, I really do not quite know what was in my mind, no, I really do not know. If I had found myself face to face with the other, I should have been convulsed with rage; but

on seeing this old man, with a prominent stomach and flabby cheeks, I was nearly choked with disgust. She, who did not look fifteen, small and slim as she was, had given herself to this big man, who was almost paralyzed, because he was a marquis and a general, the friend and representative of dethroned kings. No, I do not know what I felt, nor what I thought. I could not have lifted my hand against this old man; it would have disgraced me! And I no longer felt inclined to kill my wife, but all women who could be guilty of such things! I was no longer jealous; I was dismayed, as if I had seen the horror of horrors!

"Let people say what they like of men, they are not so vile as that! If a man is known to have given himself up to an old woman in that fashion, people point their finger at him. The husband or lover of an old woman is more despised than a thief. We men are a decent lot, as a rule, but women, many women, are absolutely bad. They will give themselves to all men, old or young, from the most contemptible and different motives, because it is their profession, their vocation, and their function. They are the eternal, conscienceless, and serene prostitutes, who give up their bodies, because they are the merchandise of love, which they sell, or give, to the old man who frequents the pavements with money in his pocket, or else for glory, to a lecherous old king, or to a celebrated and disgusting old man."

He cried aloud like a prophet of old, in a tone of wrath beneath the starry sky, and with the fury of a man in despair, he told of the glorified disgrace of all the mistresses of old kings, the respectable shame of all those virgins who marry old hus-

bands, the tolerated shame of all those young women who accept old men's kisses with a smile.

I could see them, as he evoked their memories, from the beginning of the world, surging round us in that Eastern night, girls, beautiful girls, with vile souls, who, like the lower animals, who know nothing of the age of the male, are docile to senile desires. Then rose up before me the handmaids of the patriarchs who are mentioned in the Bible: Hagar, Ruth, the daughters of Lot, Abigail, Abishag, the virgin of Shunam, who reanimated David with her caresses when he was dying, and the others, young, stout, white, patricians or plebeians, irresponsible females belonging to a master, and submissive slaves, whether caught by the attraction of royalty or bought as slaves!

"What did you do?" I asked.

"I went away," he replied simply. And we remained sitting side by side for a long time without speaking, only dreaming! . . .

I have retained an impression of that evening that I can never forget. All that I saw, felt, and heard, our fishing excursions, the octopus also, perhaps that harrowing story, amid those white figures on the neighboring roofs, all seemed to concur in producing a unique sensation. There is condensed in certain chance meetings, in certain inexplicable combinations of events—without its being evident on the surface—a greater amount of the secret quintessence of life than is spread over whole days of ordinary life.

FLY

RECOLLECTIONS OF A BOATMAN

"I SAW some very strange things and some very strange women when I was a boatman," he said, "and was often tempted to write a book called *On the Seine,* telling about that careless, merry, robust though needy life that I lived from the age of twenty to thirty.

"I was a mere stripling without a penny, and now I am a man who has made his money, who has spent large sums on a momentary caprice. In my heart I had then a thousand modest and unrealizable desires which gilded my existence with imaginary hopes, though now I really do not know that any fancy whatsoever would make me get out of the armchair where I am dozing. How simple, and nice, and good it is to live like this, between my office in Paris and the river at Argenteuil. For ten years the Seine was my only, my one absorbing passion. Ah! that beautiful, calm, diversified and ill-smelling

river, full of mud and filth. I think I loved it so much because it seemed to give me a sense of life. Oh! what walks I had along the grassy banks, where my friends, the frogs, were dreaming on the leaf of a nenuphar, and where the coquettish and delicate water lilies suddenly opened to me, behind a willow, like a leaf out of a Japanese album, and when the kingfisher flashed past me like a blue flame! How I loved it all, with the instinctive love of nature which seemed to be expressed by my whole body and filled me with a profound joy.

"Just as other men retain the recollection of sweet and tender nights, so I remember sunrises in the morning mist, floating, wandering vapors, which were as pale as death before the sun rose, and then at its first rays glided over the meadows, lighted up with a rosy tint, which delighted the heart. And then again, I have recollections of the moon silvering the running, trembling water with a brightness which made the foundation for dreams. And all this, the symbol of eternal illusions, rose up in me on that turbid water, which was carrying all the filth of Paris toward the sea.

"And then, what a merry life it was with my companions! There were five of us—a band of serious men we are now. As we were all poor, we had founded an inexpressible colony in a horrible eating house at Argenteuil, which possessed only one bedroom, where I have certainly spent some of the maddest nights of my life. We cared for nothing except for amusing ourselves and rowing, for we all worshiped the oar, with one exception. I remember such singular adventures, such unlikely tricks invented by those five rascals, that no one would believe them at present. People do not live

like that any longer, even on the Seine, for the mad antics we kept up have died out now.

"We five possessed only one boat, which we had bought with great difficulty, and on board of which we laughed as we shall never laugh again. It was a large yawl, called *The Overturned Leaf,* rather heavy, but spacious and comfortable. I shall not describe my companions to you. There was one little fellow called Petit Bleu, who was very sharp; a tall man, with a savage look, gray eyes, and black hair, who was nicknamed Tomahawk, the only one who never touched an oar, as he said he should upset the boat; a slender, elegant man, who was very careful about his person, and whom we called Only-One-Eye, in remembrance of a recent story about Cladel, and because he wore a monocle, and, lastly, myself, who had been baptized Joseph Prunier. We lived together in perfect harmony, and our only regret was that we had no boat-woman, for a woman's presence is almost indispensable on a boat, because it keeps the men's wits and hearts on the alert, because it animates them and wakes them up and she looks well walking on the green banks with a red parasol. But we did not want an ordinary boat-woman for us five, for we were not very like the rest of the world. We wanted something unexpected, funny, ready for everything, something, in short, which it would be almost impossible to find. We had tried many without success, girls who had held the tiller, imbecile boatwomen who always preferred wine that intoxicates to water which flows and carries the yawls. We kept them over Sunday, and then got rid of them in disgust.

"Well, one Saturday afternoon, Only-One-Eye brought us a little thin, lively, jumping, chattering

girl, full of drollery, of that drollery which is the substitute for wit among the youthful male and female workpeople who have developed in the streets of Paris. She was nice-looking without being pretty, the outline of a woman who had a little of everything, one of those silhouettes which draftsmen draw in three strokes on the table in a café after dinner, between a glass of brandy and a cigarette. Nature is like that, sometimes.

" The first evening she surprised us, amused us, and we could not form any opinion about her, so unexpectedly had she come among us; but having fallen into this nest of men, who were all ready for any folly, she was soon mistress of the situation, and the very next day she had made a conquest of each one of us. She was quite cracked, into the bargain, and must have been born with a glass of absinthe in her stomach, which her mother had drunk at the moment she was born, and she never grew sober since, for her wet nurse, so she said, recruited her strength with drafts of rum, and she never called the bottles which were standing in a line at the back of the wine merchant's shop anything but ' my holy family.'

" I do not know which of us gave her the name of Fly, nor why it was given her, but it suited her very well, and stuck to her; and our yawl every week carried five merry, strong young fellows on the Seine between Asnières and Maison Laffitte, who were ruled from under a parasol of colored paper by a lively and madcap young person, who treated us like slaves whose business it was to row her about, and of whom we were all very fond.

" We were all liked by her, for a thousand reasons at first, but for only one afterward. In the

stern of our boat she was a kind of small word mill, chattering to the wind which blew across the water. She chattered ceaselessly, with that slight, continuous noise of those mechanical winged contrivances which turn in the breeze, and she thoughtlessly said the most unexpected, the funniest, the most astonishing things. In her mind, all the parts of which seemed dissimilar, like rags of all kinds and of every color, not sewn, but merely tacked together, there appeared to be as much imagination as in a fairy tale, a good deal of coarseness, indecency, impudence, and of the unexpected, and as much breeziness and perspective as in a balloon voyage.

"We put questions to her in order to call forth answers which she found no one could tell where, and the one with which we teased her most frequently was: 'Why are you called Fly?' She gave us such unlikely reasons that we left off rowing in order to laugh. But she pleased us also as a woman; and La Toque, who never rowed, and who sat by her side at the tiller the whole day long, once replied to the usual question: 'Why are you called Fly?' 'Because she is a little Spanish fly.'

"Yes, a little, buzzing, teasing fly, not the classical, poisonous, brilliant, and mantled Spanish fly, but a little Spanish fly with red wings, which began to disturb the whole crew of *The Overturned Leaf*. And what stupid jokes were also made about this leaf where this fly had alighted!

"Since the arrival of Fly on our boat Only-One-Eye had taken a leading, superior part among us, the part of a gentleman who has a wife toward four others who have not got one, and he abused that privilege so far as to kiss Fly in our presence, when he took her on his knee after meals, and by

other prerogatives, which were as humiliating as they were irritating.

"They had been isolated in the sleeping-room by means of a curtain, but I soon perceived that my companions and I had the same arguments in our minds, in our solitude: 'Why, and in virtue of what law of exception, or of what unacceptable principle, should Fly, who does not appear troubled by any prejudices, remain faithful to her lover, while ladies of society are not faithful to their husbands?'

"Our reflections were quite in order, and we were soon convinced of it, and we ought to have made them sooner, so as not to have needed to regret any lost time, for Fly deceived Only-One-Eye with all the others of the crew of *The Overturned Leaf;* and she deceived him without making any difficulties, without any resistance, the first time any of us asked her.

"Of course, modest people will be terribly shocked! But why? What courtesan who happens to be in the fashion but has a dozen lovers, and which of those lovers is stupid enough not to know it? Is it not the correct thing to have an evening at the house of a celebrated and marked courtesan, just as one has an evening at the Opéra, the Théâtre Français, or the Odéon? Ten men subscribe together to keep a mistress just as they do to possess a race horse which only one jockey mounts, and this is a correct picture of the favored lover who does not pay anything.

"From delicacy they left Fly to Only-One-Eye from Saturday night to Monday morning, and we only deceived him during the week, in Paris, away from the Seine, which, for boatmen like us,

was hardly deceiving him at all. The situation had this peculiarity, that the four freebooters of Fly's favors were quite aware of this partition of her among themselves, and that they spoke of it to each other, and even then, with allusions that made her laugh very much. Only-One-Eye alone seemed to surmise nothing, and that peculiar position gave rise to some embarrassment between him and us, and seemed to separate him from us, to isolate him, to raise a barrier across our former confidence and our former intimacy. That gave him a difficult and a rather ridiculous part to play toward us, the part of a deceived lover, almost a husband's part.

" As he was very clever and gifted with the special faculty of not showing what he felt, we sometimes asked each other whether he did not guess anything, and he took care to let us know, in a manner that was painful for us. We were going to breakfast at Bougival, and we were rowing vigorously, when La Toque, who had that morning the triumphant look of a man who was satisfied, and who, sitting by the steerswoman, seemed to squeeze himself rather too close to her, in our estimation, stopped the rowing by calling out: ' Stop! '

" The four oars were drawn out of the water, and then, turning to his neighbor, he said to her: ' Why were you called Fly? ' But before she could reply the voice of Only-One-Eye, who was sitting in the bows, said dryly: ' Because she settles on all the carrion.'

" There was a dead silence and an embarrassed pause, which was followed by an inclination to laugh, while Fly herself looked very much confused, and La Toque gave the order: ' Row on, all! ' and the boat started again. The incident was

closed, and light let in upon the subject, and that little adventure made no difference in our habits, but it only reëstablished cordiality between Only-One-Eye and us. He once more became the honored proprietor of the Fly from Saturday night until Monday morning, as his superiority over all of us had been thoroughly established by that definition, which, moreover, closed one of the questions about the word Fly. For the future we were satisfied to play the secondary part of grateful and polite friends who profited discreetly by the week days, without any contention of any kind among ourselves.

"That answered very well for about three months, but then suddenly Fly assumed a strange attitude toward us. She was less merry, nervous, uneasy, and almost irritable, and we frequently asked her: 'What is the matter with you?' And she replied: 'Nothing; leave me alone.'

"Only-One-Eye told us what was the matter with her, one Saturday evening. We had just sat down to table in the little dining-room which our eating-house keeper, Barbichon, reserved for us at his inn, and, the soup being finished, we were waiting for the fried fish, when our friend, who also appeared thoughtful, took Fly's hand and said: 'My dear comrades, I have a very grave communication to make to you, and one that may, perhaps, give rise to a prolonged discussion, but we shall have to argue between the courses. Poor Fly has announced a piece of disastrous news to me, and at the same time has asked me to tell it to you: She is pregnant, and I will only add two words. This is not the moment to abandon her, and it is forbidden to try and find out who is the father.'

" At first we were stupefied, and felt as if some disaster had befallen us, and we looked at each other with the longing to accuse some one, but whom? Oh! Which of us? I have never felt as I did at that moment the perfidy of that cruel joke of nature which never allows a man to know for a certainty whether he is the father of his child. Then, however, by degrees a sort of feeling of consolation came over us and gave us comfort, which sprang from a confused idea of joint responsibility.

" Tomahawk, who spoke but little, formulated a beginning of reassurance by these words: ' Well, so much the worse, by Jove! Union is strength, however.' At that moment a scullion brought in the fried gudgeons, but they did not fall on them as they generally did, for they all had the same trouble on their mind, and Only-One-Eye continued: ' Under these circumstances, she has had the delicacy to confess everything to me. My friends, we are all equally guilty, so let us shake hands and adopt the child.'

" That was decided upon unanimously; they all raised their hands to the dish of fried fish and swore: ' We will adopt it.' Then, when she was thus suddenly saved, and delivered from the weight of the terrible anxiety that had been tormenting her for a month, this pretty, crazy, poor child of love, Fly, exclaimed: ' Oh! my friends! my friends! You have kind, good, hearts . . . good hearts. . . . Thank you, all of you! ' And she shed tears for the first time before us all.

" From that time on we spoke in the boat about the child, as if it were already born, and each of us took an exaggerated interest, because of our share in the matter, in the slow and regular de-

velopment of our mistress's waist, and we would stop rowing in order to say: 'Fly!' 'Here I am,' she replied. 'Boy or girl?' 'Boy.' 'What will he be when he grows up?'

"Then she indulged in the most fantastic flights of fancy. They were interminable stories, astounding inventions, from the day of his birth until his final triumph. In the unsophisticated, passionate, and moving fancy of this extraordinary little creature, who now lived chastely in the midst of us five, whom she called 'her five papas,' she saw him as a sailor, and told us that he would discover another America; as a general, restoring Alsace and Lorraine to France; then as an emperor, founding a dynasty of wise and generous rulers who would bestow settled welfare on our country; then as a learned man and natural philosopher, revealing, first of all, the secret of the manufacture of gold, then that of living for ever; then as an aeronaut, who invented the method of soaring up to the stars and of making the skies an immense promenade for men—the realization of the most unforeseen and magnificent dreams.

"How nice and how amusing she was, poor little girl, until the end of the summer, but the twentieth of September dissipated her dream. We had come back from breakfasting at the Maison Laffitte and were passing Saint-Germain, when she felt thirsty and asked us to stop at Pecq.

"For some time past she had been growing very heavy, and that inconvenienced her very much. She could not run about as she used to do, nor jump from the boat to the shore, as she had formerly done. She would try, in spite of our warnings and efforts to stop her, and would have fallen a dozen

times, had it not been that our restraining arms kept her back. On that day she was imprudent enough to wish to land before the boat had stopped; it was one of those pieces of bravado by which athletes who are ill or tired sometimes kill themselves, and at the very moment when we were passing up alongside, she rose to her feet, took a spring, and tried to jump on to the landing stage. She was not strong enough, however, and only just touched the stones with her foot, struck the sharp angle with her stomach, uttered a cry, and disappeared in the water.

" We all five plunged in at the same moment and pulled out the poor, fainting woman, who was as pale as death, and was already suffering terrible pain, and we carried her as quickly as possible to the nearest inn, and sent for a medical man. For the six hours that her miscarriage lasted, she suffered the most terrible pain with the courage of a heroine, while we were grieving round her, feverish with anxiety and fear. Then she was delivered of a dead child, and for some days we were in the greatest fear for her life; at last, however, the doctor said to us one morning: ' I think her life is saved. That girl is made of steel,' and we all of us went into her room, with radiant hearts, and Only-One-Eye, as spokesman for us all, said to her: ' The danger is all over, little Fly, and we are all happy again.'

" Then for the second time she wept in our presence, and, with her eyes full of tears, she said hesitatingly:

" ' Oh! If you only knew, if you only knew . . . what a grief it is . . . what a grief it is to me . . . I shall never get over it.' ' Over what,

little Fly?' 'Over having killed it, for I did kill it! Oh! Without intending to! Oh! how grieved I am! . . .'

"She was sobbing, and we stood round, deeply touched, but without knowing what to say, and she went on: 'Have you seen it?' And we replied with one voice: 'Yes.' 'It was a boy, was it not?' 'Yes.' 'Beautiful, was it not?' We hesitated a good deal, but Petit-Bleu, who was less scrupulous than the rest of us, made up his mind to affirm it, and said: 'Very beautiful.'

"He committed a mistake, however, for she began to sob and almost to scream with grief, and Only-One-Eye, who, perhaps, loved her more than the rest of us did, had a happy thought. Kissing her eyes, that were dimmed with tears, he said: 'Console yourself, little Fly, console yourself; we will make another for you.'

"Her innate sense of the ridiculous was suddenly excited, and, half convinced and half joking, still tearful and her heart sore with grief, she said, looking at us all:

"'Do you really mean it?' And we replied all at once:

"'We really mean it.'"

THE DEVIL

THE peasant and the doctor stood on opposite sides of the bed, beside the old, dying woman. She was calm and resigned and her mind quite clear as she looked at them and listened to their conversation. She was going to die, and she did not rebel at it, for her time was come, as she was ninety-two.

The July sun streamed in at the window and the open door and cast its hot flames on the uneven brown clay floor, which had been stamped down by four generations of clodhoppers. The smell of the fields came in also, driven by the sharp wind and parched by the noontide heat. The grasshoppers chirped themselves hoarse, and filled the country with their shrill noise, which was like that of the wooden toys which are sold to children at fair time.

The doctor raised his voice and said: "Honoré, you cannot leave your mother in this state; she may die at any moment." And the peasant, in great distress, replied: "But I must get in my wheat, for it has been lying on the ground a long time, and the weather is just right for it; what do you say about it, mother?" And the dying old woman, still tormented by her Norman avariciousness, replied yes with her eyes and her forehead, and thus urged her son to get in his wheat, and to leave her to die alone.

But the doctor got angry, and, stamping his foot, he said: "You are no better than a brute, do you hear, and I will not allow you to do it, do you understand? And if you must get in your wheat to-day, go and fetch Rapet's wife and make her look after your mother; I will have it, do you understand me? And if you do not obey me, I will let you die like a dog, when you are ill in your turn; do you hear?"

The peasant, a tall, thin fellow with slow movements, who was tormented by indecision, by his fear of the doctor and his fierce love of saving, hesitated, calculated, and stammered out: "How much does la Rapet charge for attending sick people?" "How should I know?" the doctor cried. "That depends upon how long she is needed. Settle it with her, by Heaven! But I want her to be here within an hour, do you hear?"

So the man decided. "I will go for her," he replied; "don't get angry, doctor." And the latter left, calling out as he went: "Be careful, be very careful, you know, for I do not joke when I am angry!" As soon as they were alone the peasant turned to his mother and said in a resigned voice:

" I will go and fetch la Rapet, as the man will have it. Don't worry till I get back."

And he went out in his turn.

La Rapet, who was an old washerwoman, watched the dead and the dying of the neighborhood, and then, as soon as she had sewn her customers into that linen cloth from which they would emerge no more, she went and took up her iron to smooth out the linen of the living. Wrinkled like a last year's apple, spiteful, envious, avaricious with a phenomenal avarice, bent double, as if she had been broken in half across the loins by the constant motion of passing the iron over the linen, one might have said that she had a kind of abnormal and cynical love of a death struggle. She never spoke of anything but of the people she had seen die, of the various kinds of deaths at which she had been present, and she related with the greatest minuteness details which were always similar, just as a sportsman recounts his luck.

When Honoré Bontemps entered her cottage, he found her preparing the starch for the collars of the women villagers, and he said: " Good evening; I hope you are pretty well, Mother Rapet? "

She turned her head round to look at him, and said: " As usual, as usual, and you? " " Oh! as for me, I am as well as I could wish, but my mother is not well." " Your mother? " " Yes, my mother! " " What's the matter with her? " " She is going to turn up her toes, that's what's the matter with her! "

The old woman took her hands out of the water and asked with sudden sympathy: " Is she as bad as all that? " " The doctor says she will not last till morning." " Then she certainly is very bad! "

Honoré hesitated, for he wanted to make a few preparatory remarks before coming to his proposition; but as he could hit upon nothing, he made up his mind suddenly.

"How much will you ask to stay with her till the end? You know that I am not rich, and I cannot even afford to keep a servant girl. It is just that which has brought my poor mother to this state—too much worry and fatigue! She did the work of ten, in spite of her ninety-two years. You don't find any made of that stuff nowadays! . . ."

La Rapet answered gravely: "There are two prices: Forty sous by day and three francs by night for the rich, and twenty sous by day and forty by night for the others. You shall pay me the twenty and forty." But the peasant reflected, for he knew his mother well. He knew how tenacious of life, how vigorous and unyielding she was, and she might last another week, in spite of the doctor's opinion; and so he said resolutely: "No, I would rather you would fix a price for the whole time until the end. I will take my chance, one way or the other. The doctor says she will die very soon. If that happens, so much the better for you, and so much the worse for her, but if she holds out till to-morrow or longer, so much the better for her and so much the worse for you!"

The nurse looked at the man in astonishment, for she had never treated a death as a speculation, and she hesitated, tempted by the idea of the possible gain, but she suspected that he wanted to play her a trick. "I can say nothing until I have seen your mother," she replied.

"Then come with me and see her."

She washed her hands, and went with him.

They did not speak on the road; she walked with short, hasty steps, while he strode on with his long legs, as if he were crossing a brook at every step.

The cows lying down in the fields, overcome by the heat, raised their heads heavily and lowed feebly at the two passers-by, as if to ask them for some green grass.

When they got near the house, Honoré Bontemps murmured: "Suppose it is all over?" And the unconscious wish which he had that it might be so showed itself in the sound of his voice.

But the old woman was not dead. She was lying on her back, on her wretched bed, her hands covered with a purple cotton counterpane, horribly thin, knotty hands, like the claws of animals, like crabs, half closed by rheumatism, fatigue, and the work of nearly a century which she had accomplished.

La Rapet went up to the bed and looked at the dying woman, felt her pulse, tapped her on the chest, listened to her breathing, and asked her questions, so as to hear her speak; and then, having looked at her for some time, she went out of the room, followed by Honoré. Her decided opinion was that the old woman would not last out till night. He asked: "Well?" And the sick-nurse replied: "Well, she may last two days, perhaps three. You will have to give me six francs, everything included."

"Six francs! six francs!" he shouted. "Are you out of your mind? I tell you that she cannot last more than five or six hours!" And they disputed angrily for some time, but as the nurse said she must go home, as the time was going by, and as his wheat would not come to the farmyard of its own accord, he finally agreed to her terms.

"Very well, then, that is settled; six francs, including everything, until the corpse is taken out." "That is settled, six francs."

And he went away, with long strides, to his wheat which was lying on the ground under the hot sun which ripens the grain, while the sick-nurse went in again to the house.

She had brought some work with her, for she worked without ceasing by the side of the dead and dying, sometimes for herself, sometimes for the family which employed her as seamstress and paid her rather more in that capacity. Suddenly she asked: "Have you received the last sacraments, Mother Bontemps?"

The old peasant woman shook her head, and la Rapet, who was very devout, got up quickly: "Good heavens, is it possible? I will go and fetch the priest;" and she rushed off to the parsonage so quickly that the urchins in the street thought some accident had happened, when they saw her running.

The priest came immediately in his surplice, preceded by a choir boy who rang a bell to announce the passage of the Host through the parched and quiet country. Some men who were working at a distance took off their large hats and remained motionless until the white vestment had disappeared behind some farm buildings; the women who were making up the sheaves stood up to make the sign of the cross; the frightened black hens ran away along the ditch until they reached a well-known hole, through which they suddenly disappeared, while a foal which was tied in a meadow took fright at the sight of the surplice and began to gallop round and round, kicking out every now and

then. The acolyte, in his red cassock, walked quickly, and the priest, with his head inclined toward one shoulder and his square biretta on his head, followed him, muttering some prayers; while last of all came la Rapet, bent almost double as if she wished to prostrate herself, as she walked with folded hands as they do in church.

Honoré saw them pass in the distance, and he asked: "Where is our priest going?" His man, who was more intelligent, replied: "He is taking the sacrament to your mother, of course!"

The peasant was not surprised, and said: "That may be," and went on with his work.

Mother Bontemps confessed, received absolution and communion, and the priest took his departure, leaving the two women alone in the suffocating room, while la Rapet began to look at the dying woman, and to ask herself whether it could last much longer.

The day was on the wane, and gusts of cooler air began to blow, causing a view of Epinal, which was fastened to the wall by two pins, to flap up and down; the scanty window curtains, which had formerly been white, but were now yellow and covered with fly-specks, looked as if they were going to fly off, as if they were struggling to get away, like the old woman's soul.

Lying motionless, with her eyes open, she seemed to await with indifference that death which was so near and which yet delayed its coming. Her short breathing whistled in her constricted throat. It would stop altogether soon, and there would be one woman less in the world; no one would regret her.

At nightfall Honoré returned, and when he went up to the bed and saw that his mother was still alive,

he asked: "How is she?" just as he had done formerly when she had been ailing, and then he sent la Rapet away, saying to her: "To-morrow morning at five o'clock, without fail." And she replied: "To-morrow, at five o'clock."

She came at daybreak, and found Honoré eating his soup, which he had made himself before going to work, and the sick-nurse asked him: "Well, is your mother dead?" "She is rather better, on the contrary," he replied, with a sly look out of the corner of his eyes. And he went out.

La Rapet, seized with anxiety, went up to the dying woman, who remained in the same state, lethargic and impassive, with her eyes open and her hands clutching the counterpane. The nurse perceived that this might go on thus for two days, four days, eight days, and her avaricious mind was seized with fear, while she was furious at the sly fellow who had tricked her, and at the woman who would not die.

Nevertheless, she began to work, and waited, looking intently at the wrinkled face of Mother Bontemps. When Honoré returned to breakfast he seemed quite satisfied and even in a bantering humor. He was decidedly getting in his wheat under very favorable circumstances.

La Rapet was becoming exasperated; every minute now seemed to her so much time and money stolen from her. She felt a mad inclination to take this old woman, this headstrong old fool, this obstinate old wretch, and to stop that short, rapid breath, which was robbing her of her time and money, by squeezing her throat a little. But then she reflected on the danger of doing so, and other thoughts came into her head; so she went up to the

bed and said: "Have you ever seen the Devil?" Mother Bontemps murmured: "No."

Then the sick-nurse began to talk and to tell her tales which were likely to terrify the weak mind of the dying woman. Some minutes before one dies the Devil appears, she said, to all who are in the death throes. He has a broom in his hand, a saucepan on his head, and he utters loud cries. When anybody sees him, all is over, and that person has only a few moments longer to live. She then enumerated all those to whom the Devil had appeared that year: Josephine Loisel, Eulalie Ratier, Sophie Padaknau, Séraphine Grospied.

Mother Bontemps, who had at last become disturbed in mind, moved about, wrung her hands, and tried to turn her head to look toward the end of the room. Suddenly la Rapet disappeared at the foot of the bed. She took a sheet out of the cupboard and wrapped herself up in it; she put the iron saucepan on her head, so that its three short bent feet rose up like horns, and she took a broom in her right hand and a tin pail in her left, which she threw up suddenly, so that it might fall to the ground noisily.

When it came down, it certainly made a terrible noise. Then, climbing upon a chair, the nurse lifted up the curtain which hung at the bottom of the bed, and showed herself, gesticulating and uttering shrill

cries into the iron saucepan which covered her face, while she menaced the old peasant woman, who was nearly dead, with her broom.

Terrified, with an insane expression on her face, the dying woman made a superhuman effort to get up and escape; she even got her shoulders and chest out of bed; then she fell back with a deep sigh. All was over, and la Rapet calmly put everything back into its place; the broom into the corner by the cupboard, the sheet inside it, the saucepan on the hearth, the pail on the floor, and the chair against the wall. Then, with professional movements, she closed the dead woman's large eyes, put a plate on the bed and poured some holy water into it, placing in it the twig of boxwood that had been nailed to the chest of drawers, and kneeling down, she fervently repeated the prayers for the dead, which she knew by heart, as a matter of business.

And when Honoré returned in the evening he found her praying, and he calculated immediately that she had made twenty sous out of him, for she had only spent three days and one night there, which made five francs altogether, instead of the six which he owed her.

GHOSTS

THE Concordat was just in its most flourishing condition when a young man, who belonged to a wealthy and highly respected middle-class family, went to the office of the head of the police at P——, to ask for help and advice, which was at once promised him.

"My father threatens to disinherit me," the young man then began, "although I have never offended against the laws of the State, of morality or of his paternal authority, but merely because I do not share his blind reverence for the Catholic Church and her ministers. On that account he looks upon me, not merely as a latitudinarian, but as a perfect atheist, and a faithful old manservant of ours, who is much attached to me, and who accidentally saw my father's will, told me in confidence that he had left all his property to the Jesuits. I

think this is highly suspicious, and I fear that the priests have been maligning me to my father. Until less than a year ago, we used to live very quietly and happily together, but ever since he has had so much to do with the clergy our domestic peace and happiness are at an end."

"What you have told me," the official replied, "is as likely as it is regrettable, but I fail to see how I can interfere in the matter. Your father is in full possession of all his mental faculties, and can dispose of all his property exactly as he pleases. I also think that your protest is premature; you must wait until his will takes legal effect, and then you can invoke the aid of justice; I am sorry to say that I can do nothing for you."

"I think you will be able to do so," the young man replied; "for I believe that a very clever piece of deceit is being carried on here."

"How? Please explain yourself more clearly."

"When I remonstrated with him yesterday evening, he referred to my dead mother, and at last assured me, in a voice of the deepest conviction, that she had frequently appeared to him and had threatened him with all the torments of the damned if he did not disinherit his son, who had fallen away from God, and leave all his property to the Church. Now, I do not believe in ghosts."

"Neither do I," the police director replied; "but I cannot well do anything on this dangerous ground, if I have nothing but suppositions to go upon. You know how the Church rules all our affairs since the Concordat with Rome, and if I investigate this matter and obtain no results, I am risking my post. It would be very different if you could adduce any proofs for your suspicions. I do not deny that I

should like to see the clerical party, which will, I fear, be the ruin of Austria, receive a staggering blow; try, therefore, to get to the bottom of this business, and then we will talk it over again."

About a month passed without the young latitudinarian being heard of; but then he suddenly came one evening, evidently in a great state of excitement, and told the chief of police that he was in a position to expose the priestly deceit which he had mentioned, if the authorities would assist him. The police director asked for further information.

"I have obtained a number of important clues," the young man said. "In the first place, my father confessed to me that my mother did not appear to him in our house, but in the churchyard where she is buried. My mother was consumptive for many years, and a few weeks before her death she went to the village of S——, where she died and was buried. In addition to this, I found out from our footman that my father has already left the house twice, late at night, in company of K——, the Jesuit priest, and that on both occasions he did not return till morning. Each time he was remarkably uneasy and low-spirited after his return, and had three masses said for my dead mother. He also told me just now that he has to leave home this evening on business, but immediately he told me that our footman saw the Jesuit go out of the house. We may, therefore, assume, that he intends this evening to consult the spirit of my dead mother again, and this would be an excellent opportunity for getting on the track of the matter, if you do not object to opposing the most powerful force in the Empire, for the sake of such an insignificant individual as myself."

"Every citizen has an equal right to the protection of the State," the police officer replied; "and I think that I have shown often enough that I am not wanting in courage to perform my duty, no matter how serious the consequences may be; but only very young men act without any prospects of success, as they are carried away by their feelings. When you came to me the first time I was obliged to refuse your request for assistance, but to-day your shares have risen in value. It is now eight o'clock, and I shall expect you in two hours' time, here in my office. At present all you have to do is to hold your tongue; everything else is my affair."

As soon as it was dark four men got into a closed carriage in the yard of the police office and were driven in the direction of the village of S——; their carriage, however, did not enter the village, but stopped at the edge of a small wood in the immediate neighborhood. Here they all four alighted; they were the chief of police, accompanied by the young latitudinarian, a police sergeant, and an ordinary policeman, who was, however, dressed in plain clothes.

"The first thing for us to do is to examine the locality carefully," the police director said; "it is eleven o'clock, and the exorcisers of ghosts will not arrive before midnight, so we have time to look round us, and to take our measure."

The four men went to the churchyard, which lay at the end of the village, near the little wood. Everything was as still as death, and not a soul was to be seen. The sexton was evidently sitting in the public house, for they found the door of his cottage locked, as well as the door of the little chapel that stood in the middle of the churchyard.

"Where is your mother's grave?" the police director asked; but as there were only a few stars visible, it was not easy to find it. However, at last they managed it, and the police officer looked about in the neighborhood of it.

"The position is not a very favorable one for us," he said at last; "there is nothing here, not even a shrub, behind which we could hide."

But just then the policeman said that he had tried to get into the sexton's hut through the door or the window, and that at last he had succeeded in doing so by breaking open a square in a window, which had been mended with paper, and that he had opened it and obtained possession of the key which he brought to the police chief.

His plans were very quickly settled. He had the chapel opened and went in with the young latitudinarian; then he told the police sergeant to lock the door behind him and to put the key back where he had found it, and to shut the window of the sexton's cottage carefully. Lastly, he made arrangements as to what they were to do, in case anything unforeseen should occur, whereupon the sergeant and the constable left the churchyard and lay down in a ditch at some distance from the gate, but opposite to it.

Almost as soon as the clock struck half-past eleven, they heard steps near the chapel, whereupon the police chief and the young latitudinarian went to the window, in order to watch the beginning of the exorcism, and as the chapel was in total darkness, they thought that they should be able to see, without being seen; but matters turned out differently from what they expected.

Suddenly the key turned in the lock, and they

barely had time to conceal themselves behind the altar before two men came in, one of whom was carrying a dark lantern. One was the young man's father, an elderly man of the middle class, who seemed very unhappy and depressed, the other the Jesuit Father K——, a tall, thin, big-boned man, with a thin, bilious face, in which two large gray eyes shone restlessly under their bushy black eyebrows. He lit the tapers which were standing on the altar, and then began to say a requiem mass; while the old man knelt on the altar steps and served him.

When it was over the Jesuit took the book of the Gospels and the holy-water sprinkler and went slowly out of the chapel, while the old man followed him, with the holy-water basin in one hand and a taper in the other. Then the police director left his hiding-place, and stooping down, so as not to be seen, he crept to the chapel window, where he cowered down carefully, and the young man followed his example. They were now looking straight on his mother's grave.

The Jesuit, followed by the superstitious old man, walked three times round the grave, then he remained standing before it, and by the light of the taper, he read a few passages from the Gospel; then he dipped the holy-water sprinkler three times into the holy-water basin, and sprinkled the grave three times; then both returned to the chapel, knelt down outside it with their faces toward the grave, and began to pray aloud, until at last the Jesuit sprang up, in a species of wild ecstasy, and cried out three times in a shrill voice:

"*Exsurge! Exsurge! Exsurge!*"

Scarcely had the last word of the exorcism died

away when thick blue smoke rose out of the grave, which rapidly grew into a cloud, and began to assume the outlines of a human body, until at last a tall white figure stood behind the grave and beckoned with its hand.

"Who art thou?" the Jesuit asked solemnly, while the old man began to cry.

"When I was alive I was called Anna Maria B——," the ghost replied, in a hollow voice.

"Will you answer all my questions?" the priest continued.

"As far as I can."

"Have you not yet been delivered from purgatory by our prayers, and all the masses for your soul which we have said for you?"

"Not yet, but soon, soon I shall be."

"When?"

"As soon as that blasphemer, my son, has been punished."

"Has that not already happened? Has not your husband disinherited his lost son, and made the Church his heir, in his place?"

"That is not enough."

"What must he do besides?"

"He must deposit his will with the judicial authorities, as his last will and testament, and drive the reprobate out of his house."

"Consider well what you are saying; must this really be?"

"It must, or otherwise I shall have to languish in purgatory much longer," the sepulchral voice replied, with a deep sigh; but the next moment it yelled out in terror:

"Oh! Good Lord!" and the ghost began to run away as fast as it could. A shrill whistle was

heard, and then another, and the police chief laid his hand on the shoulder of the exorciser, accompanied with the remark:

"You are in custody."

Meanwhile, the police sergeant and the policeman, who had come into the churchyard, had caught the ghost and dragged it forward. It was the sexton, who had put on a flowing white dress, and who wore a wax mask, which bore striking resemblance to his mother, as the son declared.

When the case was heard it was proved that the mask had been very skillfully made from a portrait of the deceased woman. The Government gave orders that the matter should be investigated as secretly as possible, and left the punishment of Father K—— to the spiritual authorities, which was a matter of course, at a time when priests were outside the jurisdiction of the civil authorities; and it is needless to say that he was very comfortable during his imprisonment, in a monastery in a part of the country which abounded with game and trout.

The only valuable result of the amusing ghost story was that it brought about a reconciliation between father and son, and the former, as a matter of fact, felt such deep respect for priests and their ghosts in consequence of the apparition that a short time after his wife had left purgatory for the last time in order to talk with him—he turned Protestant.

TWO FRIENDS

BESIEGED Paris was in the throes of famine. Even the sparrows on the roofs and the rats in the sewers were growing scarce. People were eating anything they could get.

As Monsieur Morissot, watchmaker by profession and idler for the nonce, was strolling along the boulevard one bright January morning, his hands in his trousers pockets and stomach empty, he suddenly came face to face with an acquaintance—Monsieur Sauvage, a fishing chum.

Before the war broke out Morissot had been in the habit, every Sunday morning, of setting forth with a bamboo rod in his hand and a tin box on his back. He took the Argenteuil train, got out at Colombes, and walked thence to the Ile Marante. The moment he arrived at this place of his dreams he began fishing, and fished till nightfall.

Every Sunday he met in this very spot Monsieur Sauvage, a stout, jolly little man, a draper in the Rue Notre Dame de Lorette, and also an ardent fisherman. They often spent half the day side by side, rod in hand and feet dangling over the water, and a warm friendship had sprung up between the two.

Some days they did not speak; at other times they chatted; but they understood each other perfectly without the aid of words, having similar tastes and feelings.

In the spring, about ten o'clock in the morning, when the early sun caused a light mist to float on the water and gently warmed the backs of the two enthusiastic anglers, Morissot would occasionally remark to his neighbor:

"Ah, but it's pleasant here."

To which the other would reply:

"I can't imagine anything better!"

And these few words sufficed to make them understand and appreciate each other.

In the autumn, toward the close of day, when the setting sun shed a blood-red glow over the western sky, and the reflection of the crimson clouds tinged the whole river with red, flushed the faces of the two friends, and gilded the trees, whose leaves were already turning at the first chill touch of winter, Monsieur Sauvage would sometimes smile at Morissot, and say:

"What a glorious spectacle!"

And Morissot would answer, without taking his eyes from his float:

"This is much better than the boulevard, isn't it?"

As soon as they recognized each other they shook

hands cordially, affected at the thought of meeting under such changed circumstances.

Monsieur Sauvage, with a sigh, murmured:

"These are sad times!"

Morissot shook his head mournfully.

"And such weather! This is the first fine day of the year."

The sky was, in fact, of a bright, cloudless blue.

They walked along, side by side, reflective and sad.

"And to think of the fishing!" said Morissot. "What good times we used to have!"

"When shall we be able to fish again?" asked Monsieur Sauvage.

They entered a small café and took an absinthe together, then resumed their walk along the pavement.

Morissot stopped suddenly.

"Shall we have another absinthe?" he said.

"If you like," agreed Monsieur Sauvage.

And they entered another wine shop.

They were quite unsteady when they came out, owing to the effect of the alcohol on their empty stomachs. It was a fine, mild day, and a gentle breeze fanned their faces.

The fresh air completed the effect of the alcohol on Monsieur Sauvage. He stopped suddenly, saying:

"Suppose we go there?"

"Where?"

"Fishing."

"But where?"

"Why, to the old place. The French outposts are close to Colombes. I know Colonel Dumoulin, and we shall easily get leave to pass."

Morissot trembled with desire.

"Very well. I agree."

And they separated, to fetch their rods and lines.

An hour later they were walking side by side on the highroad. Presently they reached the villa occupied by the Colonel. He smiled at their request, and granted it. They resumed their walk, furnished with a password.

Soon they left the outposts behind them, made their way through deserted Colombes, and found themselves on the outskirts of the small vineyards which border the Seine. It was about eleven o'clock.

Before them lay the village of Argenteuil, apparently lifeless. The heights of Orgement and Sannois dominated the landscape. The great plain, extending as far as Nanterre, was empty, quite empty—a waste of dun-colored soil and bare cherry trees.

Monsieur Sauvage, pointing to the heights, said:

"The Prussians are up yonder!"

And the sight of the deserted country filled the two friends with vague misgivings.

The Prussians! They had never seen them as yet, but they had felt their presence in the neighborhood of Paris for months past—ruining France, pillaging, massacring, starving them. And a kind of superstitious terror mingled with the hatred they already felt toward this unknown, victorious nation

"Suppose we were to meet any of them?" said Morissot.

"We'd offer them some fish," replied Monsieur Sauvage, with that Parisian light-heartedness which nothing can wholly quench.

Still, they hesitated to show themselves in the open country, overawed by the utter silence which reigned around them.

At last Monsieur Sauvage said boldly:

"Come, we'll make a start; let us be careful!"

And they made their way through one of the vineyards, bent double, creeping along beneath the cover afforded by the vines, with eye and ear alert.

A strip of bare ground remained to be crossed before they could gain the river bank. They ran across this, and, as soon as they were at the water's edge, concealed themselves among the dry reeds.

Morissot placed his ear to the ground, to ascertain, if possible, whether footsteps were coming their way. He heard nothing. They seemed to be utterly alone.

Their confidence was restored, and they began to fish.

Before them the deserted Ile Marante hid them from the farther shore. The little restaurant was closed, and looked as if it had been deserted for years.

Monsieur Sauvage caught the first gudgeon, Monsieur Morissot the second, and almost every moment one or other raised his line with a little, glittering, silvery fish wriggling at the end: they were having excellent sport.

They slipped their catch gently into a close-woven net lying at their feet; they were filled with joy—the joy of once more indulging in a pastime of which they had long been deprived.

The sun poured its rays on their backs; they no longer heard anything or thought of anything. They ignored the rest of the world; they were fishing.

But suddenly a rumbling sound, which seemed to come from the bowels of the earth, shook the ground beneath them: the cannon were resuming their thunder.

Morissot turned his head and could see toward the left, beyond the banks of the river, the formidable outline of Mont-Valérien, from whose summit arose a white puff of smoke.

The next instant a second puff followed the first, and in a few moments a fresh detonation made the earth tremble.

Others followed, and minute by minute the mountain gave forth its deadly breath and a milky vapor, which rose slowly into the peaceful heaven and floated, cloud-like, above the summit of the cliff.

Monsieur Sauvage shrugged his shoulders.

"They are at it again!" he said.

Morissot, who was anxiously watching his float bobbing up and down, was suddenly seized with the angry impatience of a peaceful man toward the madmen who were firing thus, and remarked indignantly:

"What fools they are to kill one another like that!"

"They're worse than animals," replied Monsieur Sauvage.

And Morissot, who had just caught a bleak, declared:

"And to think that it will be just the same so long as there are governments!"

"The Republic would not have declared war," interposed Monsieur Sauvage.

Morissot interrupted him:

"Under a king we have foreign wars; under a republic we have civil war."

And the two began placidly discussing political problems with the sound common sense of peaceful, matter-of-fact citizens—agreeing on one point: that they would never be free. And Mont-Valérien thundered ceaselessly, demolishing the houses of the French with its cannon balls, grinding lives of men to powder, destroying many a dream, many a cherished hope, many a prospective happiness; ruthlessly causing endless woe and suffering in the hearts of wives, of daughters, of mothers, in other lands.

"Such is life!" declared Monsieur Sauvage.

"Say, rather, such is death!" replied Morissot, laughing.

But they suddenly trembled with alarm at the sound of footsteps behind them, and, turning round, they perceived close at hand four tall, bearded men, dressed after the manner of livery servants and wearing flat caps on their heads. They were covering the two anglers with their rifles.

The rods slipped from their owners' grasp and floated away down the river.

In the space of a few seconds they were seized, bound, thrown into a boat, and taken across to the Ile Marante.

And behind the house they had thought deserted were about a score of German soldiers.

A shaggy-looking giant, who was bestriding a chair and smoking a long clay pipe, addressed them in excellent French with the words:

"Well, gentlemen, have you had good luck with your fishing?"

Then a soldier deposited at the officer's feet the net full of fish, which he had taken care to bring away. The Prussian smiled.

"Not bad, I see. But we have something else to talk about. Listen to me, and don't be alarmed:

"You must know that, in my eyes, you are two spies sent to reconnoiter me and my movements. Naturally, I capture you and I shoot you. You pretended to be fishing, the better to disguise your real errand. You have fallen into my hands, and must take the consequences. Such is war.

"But as you came here through the outposts you must have a password for your return. Tell me that password and I will let you go."

The two friends, pale as death, stood silently side by side, a slight fluttering of the hands alone betraying their emotion.

"No one will ever know," continued the officer. "You will return peacefully to your homes, and the secret will disappear with you. If you refuse, it means death—instant death. Choose!"

They stood motionless, and did not open their lips.

The Prussian, perfectly calm, went on, with hand outstretched toward the river:

"Just think that in five minutes you will be at the bottom of that water. In five minutes! You have relations, I presume?"

Mont-Valérien still thundered.

The two fishermen remained silent. The German turned and gave an order in his own language. Then he moved his chair a little way off, that he might not be so near the prisoners, and a dozen men stepped forward, rifle in hand, and took up a position twenty paces off.

"I give you one minute," said the officer; "not a second longer."

Then he rose quickly, went over to the two

Frenchmen, took Morissot by the arm, led him a short distance off, and said in a low voice:

"Quick! the password! Your friend will know nothing. I will pretend to relent."

Morissot answered not a word.

Then the Prussian took Monsieur Sauvage aside in like manner, and made him the same proposal.

Monsieur Sauvage made no reply.

Again they stood side by side.

The officer issued his orders; the soldiers raised their rifles.

Then by chance Morissot's eyes fell on the net full of gudgeons lying in the grass a few feet from him.

A ray of sunlight made the still quivering fish glisten like silver. And Morissot's heart sank. Despite his efforts at self-control his eyes filled with tears.

"Good-by, Monsieur Sauvage," he faltered.

"Good-by, Monsieur Morissot," replied Sauvage.

They shook hands, trembling from head to foot with a dread beyond their mastery.

The officer cried:

"Fire!"

The twelve shots were as one.

Monsieur Sauvage fell forward instantaneously. Morissot, being the taller, swayed slightly and fell across his friend with face turned skyward and blood oozing from a rent in the breast of his coat.

The German issued fresh orders.

His men dispersed, and presently returned with ropes and large stones, which they attached to the feet of the two friends; then they carried them to the river bank.

Mont-Valérien, its summit now enshrouded in smoke, still continued to thunder.

Two soldiers took Morissot by the head and the feet; two others did the same with Sauvage. The bodies, swung lustily by strong hands, were cast to a distance, and, describing a curve, fell feet foremost into the stream.

The water splashed high, foamed, eddied, then grew calm; tiny waves lapped the shore.

A few streaks of blood flecked the surface of the river.

The officer, calm throughout, remarked, with grim humor:

"It's the fishes' turn now!"

Then he retraced his way to the house.

Suddenly he caught sight of the net full of gudgeons, lying forgotten in the grass. He picked it up, examined it, smiled, and called:

"Wilhelm!"

A white-aproned soldier responded to the summons, and the Prussian, tossing him the catch of the two murdered men, said:

"Have these fish fried for me at once, while they are still alive; they'll make a tasty dish."

Then he resumed his pipe.

A HAPPY LIFE

IT was tea time—the hour before the lamps were brought in. The villa overlooked the sea; the sun had disappeared and left in its wake a crimson sky flecked with gold; and the Mediterranean, not a ripple disturbing its smooth, gleaming surface, looked like a polished and limitless sheet of metal.

To the right, in the far distance, jagged mountain peaks reared their dusky outline against the tender purple of the sunset.

The company were talking of love—that old, old theme—and were saying for the hundredth time things well known to them all. The gentle melancholy of twilight made their words slow and soft, their hearts more easily moved than usual; and the word "love," pronounced now in a man's firm voice, now in a woman's musical tones, held an unwonted glamor for them all. It seemed to fill the little drawing-room,

to flutter, birdlike, through the air, to hover like a spirit above their heads.

"Can one's love last for years?"

"Yes," affirmed some.

"No," said others.

Cases were quoted, examples cited; and all the guests, men and women, full of recollections they could not reveal, which arose insistently in their minds, seemed profoundly moved, and spoke with hushed voices of that mystic, potent bond which unites man and woman for good or ill.

But suddenly some one who had been gazing out into the distance cried:

"Oh, look! look! What is that?"

Above the sea there rose, on the horizon, a large, grayish, indeterminate mass.

The women stood up, and looked wonderingly at this unexpected object, which they had never before seen.

Some one said:

"That is Corsica! It is visible like that only two or three times in the year, under certain exceptional atmospheric conditions, when the air, being absolutely clear, does not conceal it behind those curtains of sea mist which usually veil the horizon."

The Corsican mountains were vaguely distinguishable; the gazers fancied they could even see the snow on their peaks. And all were surprised, moved, well-nigh alarmed, at this sudden apparition of a world rising, phantom-like, out of the sea. Perhaps they saw strange visions, like those which appeared to Columbus from beyond the unexplored, the unknown, ocean.

Presently an old man who had not yet spoken said:

"Stay! In that very island which appears before us now, as if to answer our question by recalling to my mind a long-banished memory, I once knew a wonderful example of constant love, of an enduring and supremely happy love. I will tell the story:

"Five years ago I went on a trip through Corsica. This semi-barbarous island is less known to us, and is in reality farther from us, than America; although, as is the case to-day, it can sometimes be seen from the French coast.

"Picture to yourself a still chaotic world, a wilderness of mountains separated from one another by narrow valleys, through which rush swirling torrents; no plain, only immense waves of granite and huge undulations of the earth clothed with shrubs or with forests of lofty chestnut trees and pines. The soil is a virgin one, untilled, neglected, though here and there one comes across a village, looking like a pile of rocks, at the summit of a hill. The island boasts neither agriculture, industry, nor art. Never does one see a piece of carved wood or a block of sculptured stone, or any testimony whatever to artistic taste on the part of the aborigines. It is just this which strikes one most in this superb yet ungracious land: hereditary indifference toward that striving after the beautiful in form which we call art.

"Italy, where every place, full of works of art, is itself a work of art; where marble, wood, bronze, iron, metals, and stones all testify to the genius of man; where the smallest object lying in ancient houses reveals a divine regard for grace of form—Italy is for us the well-beloved and sacred country, because she shows us and proves to us the

greatness, the power, and the triumph of creative intelligence.

"And right opposite her savage Corsica has remained what she was from the first. Her inhabitants dwell in their rough-hewn houses, indifferent to all that does not affect their actual existence or their family quarrels. And they have retained both the faults and the virtues of primitive races. They are violent, vindictive, bloodthirsty; but they are also simple, hospitable, generous, opening their doors to the passer-by, and rewarding with absolute fidelity the smallest mark of sympathy.

"Well, for a month I had been wandering through this magnificent island, with a kind of feeling that I had reached the end of the earth. No inns, no public houses, no roads. You reach by mule paths those hamlets clinging to the mountain-sides, where the never-ceasing roar of the torrent below assails the ear from morning till night. You knock at the door of a house; you ask a night's shelter and enough food to last you till the following evening. And you sit down at the humble board, you sleep under the humble roof, and next morning you part, with a hearty handshake, from your host, who has conducted you as far as the end of the village.

"One evening, after ten hours on the road, I came across a little dwelling standing by itself at the head of a narrow valley which debouched on the sea some three miles off. The two steep mountain-sides, covered with shrubs, bowlders, and lofty trees, were as two dark walls shutting in this cheerless ravine.

"Round the cottage were a few vines, a small garden, and one or two large chestnut trees. Here

were the means of subsistence, at all events—almost a fortune, indeed, in this poverty-stricken land.

" The woman who received me was old, of austere aspect, and—wonderful to relate—very clean. The man, sitting on a rush-bottomed chair, rose in sign of welcome, and then sat down again without a word.

" ' Please excuse him,' said his companion. ' He's quite deaf. He's eighty-two years old.'

" She spoke the French of France. I was surprised.

" ' You do not belong to Corsica? ' I asked.

" ' No,' she said; ' we are from the Continent; but we have lived here for the last fifty years.'

" I shuddered at the thought of fifty years spent in this God-forsaken spot, far from the haunts of men. An old shepherd joined us, and we all sat down to the single dish of which the dinner consisted—a thick soup in which potatoes, bacon, and cabbage had been boiled together.

" When the brief meal was over I went and sat before the door, a prey to that melancholy which sometimes seizes travelers in certain lonely places or on certain lonely evenings. At such times one feels that everything is at an end—one's life, the very universe. One gets a sudden, fearful glimpse of the abject misery of life; the isolation of every human being from his fellows; the black, hopeless solitude of the heart, which, nevertheless, cheats itself with dreams until the day of death.

" The old woman joined me, and, possessed with that curiosity which survives in even the most placid and resigned of mortals, said:

" ' So you come from France? '

" ' Yes. I am on a pleasure trip.'

"'You are from Paris, perhaps?'

"'No; I am from Nancy.'

"It seemed to me—but how or why I cannot tell—that some strange emotion worked in her. She repeated slowly:

"'You are from Nancy?'

"At this juncture the man, impassible like all deaf people, appeared in the doorway. She continued:

"'Never mind him; he can't hear.'

"Then, after a few moments' pause:

"'Do you know the Nancy people?'

"'Yes; nearly everybody.'

"'The Sainte-Allaize family?'

"'Yes, very well; they are friends of my father.'

"'What is your name?'

"I told her. She looked at me fixedly, then murmured in a pensive tone, occasioned by the stirring of long-forgotten memories:

"'Yes, yes; I remember well. And what has become of the Brismares?'

"'They are all dead.'

"'Ah! And did you know the Sirmonts?'

"'Yes; the last of them is a general.'

"Then she said, trembling with emotion and moved by an irresistible impulse to confess, to tell all, to speak of those things which had hitherto remained locked in her own bosom, and of those people whose name affected her beyond words:

"'Yes; Henri de Sirmont. I know him; he is my brother.'

"I raised my eyes to her, speechless with astonishment. And suddenly I remembered.

"There had long ago been a great scandal in

the Sirmont family. Suzanne de Sirmont, young, beautiful, and rich, eloped with a non-commissioned officer in the regiment of hussars her father commanded.

"He was a handsome man of peasant birth, a man who looked well in his uniform—this soldier who had seduced his colonel's daughter. She had, no doubt, seen him, singled him out, and fallen in love with him, when watching her father's squadrons file by. But how had she got speech with him? How had they managed to see each other and come to an understanding? No one ever knew.

"Such a catastrophe had never been dreamed of. One evening the soldier disappeared with her. Search was made, but the pair were never discovered. No news of them was ever received, and Suzanne de Sirmont was looked upon as dead.

"And now I had discovered her in this gloomy valley!

"Then I asked in my turn:

"'Yes; I remember. You are Mademoiselle Suzanne?'

"She nodded her head in sign of assent. Tears fell from her eyes. Then, pointing to the old man framed in the doorway, she said:

"'That is he.'

"And I saw that she still loved him, that she still looked at him with the eyes of affection.

"'Have you been happy?' I asked.

"'Oh, yes,' she replied in a voice that came straight from her heart; 'very happy. He has made me perfectly happy. I have never had a moment's regret.'

"I looked at her, astonished at this exhibition of the power of love. Here was a rich girl who had

followed a mere peasant. She had become a peasant herself. She had resigned herself to a life destitute of charm, of luxury, of refinement of any sort; she had accommodated herself to her husband's simple ways. And she still loved him. She had become a woman of the people, wearing a cap and a coarse stuff skirt. She ate her food off an earthenware plate, on a rough wooden table, sitting on a rush-bottomed chair. Her dinner consisted of cabbage and potato soup. She lay on a hard mattress at his side.

"And she had never thought of anything but him! She had not regretted her jewels, her clothes, all the elegances of her toilet, the softness of her chairs, the perfumed warmth of her curtained boudoir, the downy softness of her bed. She had never needed aught but himself; if he were there she desired nothing more.

"She had, when quite young, forsaken her life, the world, and all those who had brought her up and loved her. She had come, alone with him, to this desolate valley. And he had been everything to her—her hopes, her dreams, her desires. He had filled her whole existence with contentment.

"She could not have been happier.

"And all night long, listening to the harsh breathing of the old soldier, extended on his pallet beside her who had followed him so far, I thought of their story, strange in its simplicity; of their happiness, so complete, yet made up of so little."

The narrator was silent. A woman said:

"But she had too lowly an ideal. Her needs were too simple, her instincts too primitive. She must have been a weak sort of creature."

Another said slowly:

"What matter! She was happy."

And on the far-off horizon Corsica melted into the gray night, was slowly swallowed up by the sea, withdrew that shadowy outline which had risen up as if to tell the story of the two humble lovers its rugged shores had sheltered.

THE FARMER'S WIFE

AID the Baron René du Treilles to me:

"Will you come and open the hunting season with me at my farm at Marinville? I shall be delighted if you will, my dear boy. In the first place, I am all alone. It is rather a difficult ground to get at, and the place I live in is so primitive that I can invite only my most intimate friends."

I accepted his invitation, and on Saturday we set out on the train going to Normandy. We alighted at a station called Almivare, and Baron René, pointing to a country wagonette drawn by a timid horse and driven by a big countryman with white hair, said:

"Here is our equipage, my dear boy."

The driver extended his hand to his landlord, and the Baron pressed it warmly, asking:

"Well, Maître Lebrument, how are you?"

"Always the same, M'sieu le Baron."

We jumped into this swinging hencoop perched on two enormous wheels, and the young horse, after a violent swerve, started into a gallop, pitching us into the air like balls. Every fall backward on the wooden bench gave me the most dreadful pain.

The peasant kept repeating in his calm, monotonous voice:

"There, there! All right, all right, Moutard, all right!"

But Moutard scarcely heard, and kept capering along like a goat.

Our two dogs behind us, in the empty part of the hencoop, were standing up and sniffing the air of the plains, where they scented game.

The Baron gazed with a sad eye into the distance at the vast Norman landscape, undulating and melancholy, like an immense English park, where the farmyards, surrounded by two or four rows of trees and full of dwarfed apple trees which hid the houses, gave a vista as far as the eye could see of forest trees, copses, and shrubbery such as landscape gardeners look for in laying out the boundaries of princely estates.

And René du Treilles suddenly exclaimed:

"I love this soil; I have my very roots in it."

He was a pure Norman, tall and strong, with a slight paunch, and of the old race of adventurers who went to found kingdoms on the shores of every ocean. He was about fifty years of age, ten years less perhaps than the farmer who was driving us.

The latter was a lean peasant, all skin and bone, one of those men who live a hundred years.

After two hours' traveling over stony roads, across that green and monotonous plain, the vehicle entered one of those orchard farmyards and drew up before an old structure falling into decay, where an old maid-servant stood waiting at the side of a young fellow, who took charge of the horse.

We entered the farmhouse. The smoky kitchen was high and spacious. The copper utensils and the crockery shone in the reflection of the hearth. A cat lay asleep on a chair, a dog under the table. One perceived the odor of milk, of apples, of smoke, that indescribable smell peculiar to old farmhouses, the odor of the earth, of the walls, of furniture, the odor of spilled stale soup, of washing, and of the old inhabitants, the smell of animals and of human beings combined, of things and of persons, the odor of time, and of things that have passed away.

I went out to have a look at the farmyard. It was very large, full of apple trees, dwarfed and crooked, and laden with fruit which fell on the grass around them. In this farmyard the Norman smell of apples was as strong as that of the bloom of orange trees on the shores of the south of France.

Four rows of beeches surrounded this inclosure. They were so tall that they seemed to touch the clouds at this hour of nightfall, and their summits, through which the night winds passed, swayed and sang a mournful, interminable song.

I reëntered the house.

The Baron was warming his feet at the fire, and was listening to the farmer's talk about country matters. He talked about marriages, births, and deaths, then about the fall in the price of grain and

the latest news about cattle. The "Veularde" (as he called a cow that had been bought at the fair of Veules) had calved in the middle of June. The cider had not been first-class last year. Apricots were almost disappearing from the country.

Then we had dinner. It was a good rustic meal, simple and abundant, long and tranquil. And while we were dining I noticed the special kind of friendly familiarity which had struck me from the start between the Baron and the peasant.

Outside, the beeches continued sighing in the night wind, and our two dogs, shut up in a shed, were whining and howling in an uncanny fashion. The fire was dying out in the big fireplace. The maid-servant had gone to bed. Maître Lebrument said in his turn:

"If you don't mind, M'sieu le Baron, I'm going to bed. I am not used to staying up late."

The Baron extended his hand toward him and said: "Go, my friend," in so cordial a tone that I said, as soon as the man had disappeared:

"He is devoted to you, this farmer?"

"Better than that, my dear fellow! It is a drama, an old drama, simple and very sad, that attaches him to me. Here is the story:

"You know that my father was a colonel in a cavalry regiment. His orderly was this young fellow, now an old man, the son of a farmer. When my father retired from the army he took this former soldier, then about forty, as his servant. I was at that time about thirty. We were living in our old château of Valrenne, near Caudebec-en-Caux.

"At this period my mother's chambermaid was one of the prettiest girls you could see, fair-haired, slender, and sprightly in manner, a genuine sou-

brette of the old type that no longer exists. To-day these creatures spring up into hussies before their time. Paris, with the aid of the railways, attracts them, calls them, takes hold of them, as soon as they are budding into womanhood, these little sluts who in old times remained simple maid-servants. Every man passing by, as recruiting sergeants did formerly, looking for recruits, with conscripts, entices and ruins them—these foolish lassies—and we have now only the scum of the female sex for servant maids, all that is dull, nasty, common, and ill-formed, too ugly even for gallantry.

" Well, this girl was charming, and I often gave her a kiss in dark corners; nothing more, I swear to you! She was virtuous, besides; and I had some respect for my mother's house, which is more than can be said of the blackguards of the present day.

" Now, it happened that my man-servant, the ex-soldier, the old farmer you have just seen, fell madly in love with this girl, perfectly daft. The first thing we noticed was that he forgot everything, he paid no attention to anything.

" My father said incessantly:

" ' See here, Jean, what's the matter with you? Are you ill?'

" He replied:

" ' No, no, M'sieu le Baron. There's nothing the matter with me.'

" He grew thin; he broke glasses and let plates fall when waiting on the table. We thought he must have been attacked by some nervous affection, and sent for the doctor, who thought he could detect symptoms of spinal disease. Then my father, full of anxiety about his faithful man-servant, decided to place him in a private hospital. When

the poor fellow heard of my father's intentions he made a clean breast of it.

"'M'sieu le Baron——'

"'Well, my boy?'

"'You see, the thing I want is not physic.'

"'Ha! what is it, then?'

"'It's marriage!'

"My father turned round and stared at him in astonishment.

"'What's that you say, eh?'

"'It's marriage.'

"'Marriage? So, then, you jackass, you're in love.'

"'That's how it is, M'sieu le Baron.'

"And my father began to laugh so immoderately that my mother called out through the wall of the next room:

"'What in the world is the matter with you, Gontran?'

"He replied:

"'Come here, Catherine.'

"And when she came in he told her, with tears in his eyes from sheer laughter, that his idiot of a servant man was lovesick.

"But my mother, instead of laughing, was deeply affected.

"'Who is it that you have fallen in love with, my poor fellow?' she asked.

"He answered without hesitation:

"'With Louise, Madame la Baronne.'

"My mother said with the utmost gravity: 'We must try to arrange this matter the best way we can.'

"So Louise was sent for and questioned by my mother; and she said in reply that she knew all

about Jean's liking for her, that in fact Jean had spoken to her about it several times, but that she did not want him. She refused to say why.

"And two months elapsed during which my father and mother never ceased to urge this girl to marry Jean. As she declared she was not in love with any other man, she could not give any serious reason for her refusal. My father at last overcame her resistance by means of a big present of money, and started the pair of them on a farm—this very farm. I did not see them for three years, and then I learned that Louise had died of consumption. But my father and mother died, too, in their turn, and it was two years more before I found myself face to face with Jean.

"At last one autumn day about the end of October the idea came into my head to go hunting on this part of my estate, which my farmer had told me was full of game.

"So one evening, one wet evening, I arrived at this house. I was shocked to find my father's old servant with perfectly white hair, though he was not more than forty-five or forty-six years of age. I made him dine with me, at the very table where we are now sitting. It was raining hard. We could hear the rain battering at the roof, the walls and the windows, flowing in a perfect deluge into the farmyard; and my dog was howling in the shed where the other dogs are howling to-night.

"All of a sudden, when the servant maid had gone to bed, the man said in a timid voice:

"'M'sieu le Baron.'

"'What is it, my dear Jean?'

"'I have something to tell you.'

"'Tell it, my dear Jean.'

"'You remember Louise, my wife.'

"' Certainly, I remember her.'

"' Well, she left me a message for you.'

"' What was it?'

"' A—a—well, it was what you might call a confession.'

"' Ha . . . and what was it about?'

"' It was—it was—I'd rather, all the same, tell you nothing about it—but I must—I must. Well, it's this—it wasn't consumption she died of at all. It was grief—well, that's the long and short of it. As soon as she came to live here after we were married, she grew thin; she changed so that you wouldn't know her, M'sieu le Baron. She was just as I was before I married her, but it was just the opposite, just the opposite.

"' I sent for the doctor. He said it was her liver that was affected—he said it was what he called a 'hepatic' complaint—I don't know these big words, M'sieu le Baron. Then I bought medicine for her, heaps on heaps of bottles that cost about three hundred francs. But she'd take none of them; she wouldn't have them; she said: 'It's no use, my poor Jean; it wouldn't do me any good.' I saw well that she had some hidden trouble; and then I found her one time crying, and I didn't know what to do, no, I didn't know what to do. I bought her caps, and dresses, and hair oil, and earrings. Nothing did her any good. And I saw that she was going to die. And so one night at the end of November, one snowy night, after she had been in bed the whole day, she told me to send for the priest. So I went for him. As soon as he came—

"' "Jean," she said, "I am going to make a confession to you. I owe it to you, Jean. I have

never been false to you, never! never, before or after you married me. M'sieu le curé is there, and can tell you so; he knows my soul. Well, listen, Jean. If I am dying, it is because I was not able to console myself for leaving the château, because I was too fond of the young Baron Monsieur René, too fond of him, mind you, Jean, there was no harm in it! This is the thing that's killing me. When I could see him no more I felt that I should die. If I could only have seen him, I might have lived, only seen him, nothing more. I wish you'd tell him some day, by and by, when I am no longer here. You will tell him, swear you will, Jean—swear it—in the presence of M'sieu le curé! It will console me to know that he will know it one day, that this was the cause of my death! Swear it!"

"'Well, I gave her my promise, M'sieu le Baron, and on the faith of an honest man I have kept my word.'

"And then he ceased speaking, his eyes filling with tears.

* * * * * * *

"Good God! my dear boy, you can't form any idea of the emotion that filled me when I heard this poor devil whose wife I had killed without suspecting it telling me this story on that wet night in this very kitchen.

"I exclaimed: 'Ah! my poor Jean! my poor Jean!'

"He murmured: 'Well, that's all, M'sieu le Baron. I could not help it, one way or the other—and now it's all over!'

"I caught his hand across the table, and I began to weep.

"He asked, 'Will you come and see her grave?' I nodded assent, for I couldn't speak. He rose, lighted a lantern, and we walked through the blinding rain by the light of the lantern.

"He opened a gate, and I saw some crosses of black wood.

"Suddenly he stopped before a marble slab and said: 'There it is,' and he flashed the lantern close to it so that I could read the inscription:

"'To Louise Hortense Marinet,
"'*Wife of Jean-François Lebrument, Farmer.*
"'She was a faithful wife. God rest her soul.'

"We fell on our knees in the damp grass, he and I, with the lantern between us, and I saw the rain beating on the white marble slab. And I thought of the heart of her sleeping there in her grave. Ah! poor heart! poor heart!

* * * * * * *

"Since then I come here every year. And I don't know why, but I feel as if I were guilty of some crime in the presence of this man who always looks as if he forgave me."

ALL OVER

COMTE DE LORMERIN had just finished dressing. He cast a parting glance at the large mirror which occupied an entire panel in his dressing-room and smiled.

He was really a fine-looking man still, although quite gray. Tall, slight, elegant, with no sign of a paunch, with a small mustache of doubtful shade, which might be called fair, he had a walk, a nobility, a *chic,* in short, that indescribable something which establishes a greater difference between two men than would millions of money. He murmured:

"Lormerin is still alive!"

And he went into the drawing-room where his correspondence awaited him.

On his table, where everything had its place, the work table of the gentleman who never works, there were a dozen letters lying beside three newspapers of different opinions. With a single touch he spread out all these letters, like a gambler giving

the choice of a card; and he scanned the handwriting, a thing he did each morning before opening the envelopes.

It was for him a moment of delightful expectancy, of inquiry and vague anxiety. What did these sealed mysterious letters bring him? What did they contain of pleasure, of happiness, or of grief? He surveyed them with a rapid sweep of the eye, recognizing the writing, selecting them, making two or three lots, according to what he expected from them. Here, friends; there, persons to whom he was indifferent; further on, strangers. The last kind always gave him a little uneasiness. What did they want from him? What hand had traced those curious characters full of thoughts, promises, or threats?

This day one letter in particular caught his eye. It was simple, nevertheless, without seeming to reveal anything; but he looked at it uneasily, with a sort of chill at his heart. He thought: "From whom can it be? I certainly know this writing, and yet I can't identify it."

He raised it to a level with his face, holding it delicately between two fingers, striving to read through the envelope, without making up his mind to open it.

Then he smelled it, and snatched up from the table a little magnifying glass which he used in studying all the niceties of handwriting. He suddenly felt unnerved. "Whom is it from? This hand is familiar to me, very familiar. I must have often read its tracings, yes, very often. But this must have been a long, long time ago. Whom the deuce can it be from? Pooh! it's only somebody asking for money."

And he tore open the letter. Then he read:

"My Dear Friend: You have, without doubt, forgotten me, for it is now twenty-five years since we saw each other. I was young; I am old. When I bade you farewell, I left Paris in order to follow into the provinces my husband, my old husband, whom you used to call 'my hospital.' Do you remember him? He died five years ago, and now I am returning to Paris to get my daughter married, for I have a daughter, a beautiful girl of eighteen, whom you have never seen. I informed you of her birth, but you certainly did not pay much attention to so trifling an event.

"You are still the handsome Lormerin; so I have been told. Well, if you still recollect little Lise, whom you used to call Lison, come and dine with her this evening, with the elderly Baronne de Vance, your ever faithful friend, who, with some emotion, although happy, reaches out to you a devoted hand, which you must clasp, but no longer kiss, my poor Jaquelet. Lise de Vance."

Lormerin's heart began to throb. He remained sunk in his armchair with the letter on his knees, staring straight before him, overcome by a poignant emotion that made the tears mount up to his eyes!

If he had ever loved a woman in his life it was this one, little Lise, Lise de Vance, whom he called "Cinder-Flower," on account of the strange color of her hair and the pale gray of her eyes. Oh! what a fine, pretty, charming creature she was, this frail Baronne, the wife of that gouty, pimply Baron, who had abruptly carried her off to the provinces, shut her up, kept her in seclusion through jealousy, jealousy of the handsome Lormerin.

Yes, he had loved her, and he believed that he, too, had been truly loved. She familiarly gave him the name of Jaquelet, and would pronounce that word in a delicious fashion.

A thousand forgotten memories came back to

him, far off and sweet and melancholy now. One evening she had called on him on her way home from a ball, and they went for a stroll in the Bois de Boulogne, she in evening dress, he in his dressing-jacket. It was springtime; the weather was beautiful. The fragrance from her bodice embalmed the warm air—the odor of her bodice, and perhaps, too, the fragrance of her skin. What a divine night! When they reached the lake, as the moon's rays fell across the branches into the water, she began to weep. A little surprised, he asked her why.

She replied:

"I don't know. The moon and the water have affected me. Every time I see poetic things I have a tightening at the heart, and I have to cry."

He smiled, affected himself, considering her feminine emotion charming—the unaffected emotion of a poor little woman whom every sensation overwhelms. And he embraced her passionately, stammering:

"My little Lise, you are exquisite."

What a charming love affair, short-lived and dainty, it had been, and over all too quickly, cut short in the midst of its ardor by this old brute of a Baron, who had carried off his wife, and never let any one see her afterward.

Lormerin had forgotten, in fact, at the end of two or three months. One woman drives out the other so quickly in Paris, when one is a bachelor! No matter; he had kept a little altar for her in his heart, for he had loved her alone! He assured himself now that this was so.

He rose, and said aloud: "Certainly, I will go and dine with her this evening!"

And instinctively he turned toward the mirror to inspect himself from head to foot. He reflected: "She must look very old, older than I look." And he felt gratified at the thought of showing himself to her still handsome, still fresh, of astonishing her, perhaps of filling her with emotion, and making her regret those bygone days so far, far distant!

He turned his attention to the other letters. They were of no importance.

The whole day he kept thinking of this ghost of other days. What was she like now? How strange it was to meet in this way after twenty-five years! But would he recognize her?

He made his toilet with feminine coquetry, put on a white waistcoat, which suited him better with the coat than a black one, sent for the hairdresser to give him a finishing touch with the curling iron, for he had preserved his hair, and started very early in order to show his eagerness to see her.

The first thing he saw on entering a pretty drawing-room newly furnished was his own portrait, an old faded photograph, dating from the days when he was a beau, hanging on the wall in an antique silk frame.

He sat down and waited. A door opened behind him. He rose up abruptly, and, turning round, beheld an old woman with white hair who extended both hands toward him.

He seized them, kissed them one after the other several times; then, lifting up his head, he gazed at the woman he had loved.

Yes, it was an old lady, an old lady whom he did not recognize, and who, while she smiled, seemed ready to weep.

He could not abstain from murmuring:

"Is it you, Lise?"

She replied:

"Yes, it is I; it is I, indeed. You would not have known me, would you? I have had so much sorrow—so much sorrow. Sorrow has consumed my life. Look at me now—or, rather, don't look at me! But how handsome you have kept—and young! If I had by chance met you in the street I would have exclaimed: 'Jaquelet!' Now, sit down and let us, first of all, have a chat. And then I will call my daughter, my grown-up daughter. You'll see how she resembles me—or, rather, how I resembled her—no, it is not quite that; she is just like the 'me' of former days—you shall see! But I wanted to be alone with you first. I feared that there would be some emotion on my side, at the first moment. Now it is all over; it is past. Pray be seated, my friend."

He sat down beside her, holding her hand; but he did not know what to say; he did not know this woman—it seemed to him that he had never seen her before. Why had he come to this house? What could he talk about? Of the long ago? What was there in common between him and her? He could no longer recall anything in presence of this grandmotherly face. He could no longer recall all the nice, tender things, so sweet, so bitter, that had come to his mind that morning when he thought of the other, of little Lise, of the dainty Cinder-Flower. What, then, had become of her, the former one, the one he had loved? That woman of far-off dreams, the blonde with gray eyes, the young girl who used to call him "Jaquelet" so prettily?

They remained side by side, motionless, both constrained, troubled, profoundly ill at ease.

As they talked only commonplaces, awkwardly and spasmodically and slowly, she rose and pressed the button of the bell.

"I am going to call Renée," she said.

There was a tap at the door, then the rustle of a dress; then a young voice exclaimed:

"Here I am, mama!"

Lormerin remained bewildered as at the sight of an apparition.

He stammered:

"Good day, Mademoiselle."

Then, turning toward the mother:

"Oh! it is you!"

In fact, it was she, she whom he had known in bygone days, the Lise who had vanished and come back! In her he found the woman he had won twenty-five years before. This one was even younger, fresher, more childlike.

He felt a wild desire to open his arms, to clasp her to his heart again, murmuring in her ear:

"Good morning, Lison!"

A man-servant announced:

"Dinner is ready, Madame."

And they proceeded toward the dining-room.

What passed at this dinner? What did they say to him, and what could he say in reply? He found himself plunged in one of those strange dreams which border on insanity. He gazed at the two women with a fixed idea in his mind, a morbid, self-contradictory idea:

"Which is the real one?"

The mother smiled, repeating over and over again:

"Do you remember?" And it was in the bright eyes of the young girl that he found again his

memories of the past. Twenty times he opened his mouth to say to her: "Do you remember, Lison? ——" forgetting this white-haired lady who was looking at him tenderly.

And yet, there were moments when he no longer felt sure, when he lost his head. He could see that the woman of to-day was not exactly the woman of long ago. The other one, the former one, had in her voice, in her glances, in her entire being, something which he did not find again. And he made prodigious efforts of mind to recall his lady-love, to seize again what had escaped from her, what this resuscitated one did not possess.

The Baronne said:

"You have lost your old vivacity, my poor friend."

He murmured:

"There are many other things that I have lost!"

But in his heart, touched with emotion, he felt his old love springing to life once more, like an awakened wild beast ready to bite him.

The young girl went on chattering, and every now and then some familiar intonation, some expression of her mother's, a certain style of speaking and thinking, that resemblance of mind and manner which people acquire by living together, shook Lormerin from head to foot. All these things penetrated him, making the reopened wound of his passion bleed anew.

He got away early, and took a turn along the boulevard. But the image of this young girl pursued him, haunted him, quickened his heart, inflamed his blood. Apart from the two women, he now saw only one, a young one, the old one come

back out of the past, and he loved her as he had loved her in bygone years. He loved her with greater ardor, after an interval of twenty-five years.

He went home to reflect on this strange and terrible thing, and to think what he should do.

But, as he was passing, with a wax candle in his hand, before the glass, the large glass in which he had contemplated himself and admired himself before he started, he saw reflected there an elderly, gray-haired man; and suddenly he recollected what he had been in olden days, in the days of little Lise. He saw himself charming and handsome, as he had been when he was loved! Then, drawing the light nearer, he looked at himself more closely, as one inspects a strange thing with a magnifying glass, tracing the wrinkles, discovering those frightful ravages, which he had not perceived till now.

And he sat down, crushed at the sight of himself, at the sight of his lamentable image, murmuring:

"All over. Lormerin!"

THE PRISONERS

THERE was not a sound in the forest save the indistinct, fluttering sound of the snow falling on the trees. It had been snowing since noon; a little fine snow, that covered the branches as with frozen moss, and spread a silvery covering over the dead leaves in the ditches, and covered the roads with a white, yielding carpet, and made still more intense the boundless silence of this ocean of trees.

Before the door of the forester's dwelling a young woman, her arms bare to the elbow, was chopping wood with a hatchet on a block of stone. She was tall, slender, strong—a true girl of the woods, daughter and wife of a forester.

A voice called from within the house:

"We are alone to-night, Berthine; you must

come in. It is getting dark, and there may be Prussians or wolves about."

"I've just finished, mother," replied the young woman, splitting as she spoke an immense log of wood with strong, deft blows, which expanded her chest each time she raised her arms to strike. "Here I am; there's no need to be afraid; it's quite light still."

Then she gathered up her sticks and logs, piled them in the chimney corner, went back to close the great oaken shutters, and finally came in, drawing behind her the heavy bolts of the door.

Her mother, a wrinkled old woman whom age had rendered timid, was spinning by the fireside.

"I am uneasy," she said, "when your father's not here. Two women are not much good."

"Oh," said the younger woman, "I'd cheerfully kill a wolf or a Prussian if it came to that."

And she glanced at a heavy revolver hanging above the hearth.

Her husband had been called upon to serve in the army at the beginning of the Prussian invasion, and the two women had remained alone with the old father, a keeper named Nicolas Pichon, sometimes called Long-legs, who refused obstinately to leave his home and take refuge in the town.

This town was Rethel, an ancient stronghold built on a rock. Its inhabitants were patriotic, and had made up their minds to resist the invaders, to fortify their native place, and, if need be, to stand a siege as in the good old days. Twice already, under Henri IV and under Louis XIV, the people of Rethel had distinguished themselves by their heroic defense of their town. They would do as much now, or else be slaughtered within their walls.

They had, therefore, bought cannon and rifles, organized a militia, and formed themselves into battalions and companies, and now spent their time drilling all day long in the square. All—bakers, grocers, butchers, lawyers, carpenters, booksellers, chemists—took their turn at military training, at regular hours of the day, under the auspices of Monsieur Lavigne, a former noncommissioned officer in the dragoons, now a draper, having married the daughter and inherited the business of Monsieur Ravaudan, Senior.

He had taken the rank of commanding officer in Rethel, and, seeing that all the young men had gone off to the war, he had enlisted all the others who were in favor of resisting an attack. Fat men now invariably walked the streets at a rapid pace, to reduce their weight and improve their breathing, and weak men carried weights to strengthen their muscles.

And they awaited the Prussians. But the Prussians did not appear. They were not far off, however, for twice already their scouts had penetrated as far as the forest dwelling of Nicolas Pichon, called Long-legs.

The old keeper, who could run like a fox, had come and warned the town. The guns had been got ready, but the enemy had not shown themselves.

Long-legs's dwelling served as an outpost in the Aveline forest. Twice a week the old man went to the town for provisions and brought the citizens news of the outlying district.

On this particular day he had gone to announce the fact that a small detachment of German infantry had halted at his house the day before, about two o'clock in the afternoon, and had left again

almost immediately. The noncommissioned officer in charge spoke French.

When the old man set out like this he took with him his dogs—two powerful animals with the jaws of lions—as a safeguard against the wolves, which were beginning to get fierce, and he left directions with the two women to barricade themselves securely within their dwelling as soon as night fell.

The younger feared nothing, but her mother was always apprehensive, and repeated continually:

"We'll come to grief one of these days. You see if we don't!"

This evening she was, if possible, more nervous than ever.

"Do you know what time your father will be back?" she asked.

"Oh, not before eleven, for certain. When he dines with the commandant he's always late."

And Berthine was hanging her pot over the fire to warm the soup when she suddenly stood still, listening attentively to a sound that had reached her through the chimney.

"There are people walking in the wood," she said; "seven or eight men at least."

The terrified old woman stopped her spinning-wheel, and gasped:

"Oh, my God! And your father not here!"

She had scarcely finished speaking when a succession of violent blows shook the door.

As the woman made no reply, a loud, guttural voice shouted:

"Open the door!"

After a brief silence the same voice repeated:

"Open the door or I'll break it down!"

Berthine took the heavy revolver from its hook,

slipped it into the pocket of her skirt, and, putting her ear to the door, asked:

"Who are you?"

"The detachment that came here the other day," replied the voice.

"What do you want?" demanded the young woman.

"My men and I have lost our way in the forest since morning. Open the door or I'll break it down!"

The forester's daughter had no choice; she shot back the heavy bolts, threw open the ponderous shutter, and perceived in the wan light of the snow six men, six Prussian soldiers, the same who had visited the house the day before.

"What are you doing here at this time of night?" she asked dauntlessly.

"I lost my bearings," replied the officer; "lost them completely. Then I recognized this house. I've eaten nothing since morning, nor my men either."

"But I'm quite alone with my mother this evening," said Berthine.

"Never mind," replied the soldier, who seemed a decent sort of fellow. "We won't do you any harm, but you must give us something to eat. We are nearly dead with hunger and fatigue."

Then the girl moved aside.

"Come in," she said.

They entered, covered with snow, their helmets sprinkled with a creamy-looking froth, which gave them the appearance of meringues. They seemed utterly worn out.

The young woman pointed to the wooden benches on either side of the large table.

"Sit down," she said, "and I'll make you some soup. You certainly look tired out, and no mistake."

Then she bolted the door afresh.

She put more water in the pot, added butter and potatoes; then, taking down a piece of bacon from a hook in the chimney corner, cut it in two and slipped half of it into the pot.

The six men watched her movements with hungry eyes. They had placed their rifles and helmets in a corner and waited for supper, as well behaved as children on a school bench.

The old mother had resumed her spinning, casting from time to time a furtive and uneasy glance at the soldiers. Nothing was to be heard save the humming of the wheel, the crackling of the fire, and the singing of the water in the pot.

But suddenly a strange noise—a sound like the harsh breathing of some wild animal sniffing under the door—startled the occupants of the room.

The German officer sprang toward the rifles. Berthine stopped him with a gesture, and said, smilingly:

"It's only the wolves. They are like you—prowling hungry through the forest."

The incredulous man wanted to see with his own eyes, and as soon as the door was opened he perceived two large grayish animals disappearing with long, swinging trot into the darkness.

He returned to his seat, muttering:

"I wouldn't have believed it!"

And he waited quietly till supper was ready.

The men devoured their meal voraciously, with mouths stretched to their ears that they might swallow the more. Their round eyes opened at the same

time as their jaws, and as the soup coursed down their throats it made a noise like the gurgling of water in a rainpipe.

The two women watched in silence the movements of the big red beards. The potatoes seemed to be engulfed in these moving fleeces.

But, as they were thirsty, the forester's daughter went down to the cellar to draw them some cider. She was gone some time. The cellar was small, with an arched ceiling, and had served, so people said, both as prison and as hiding-place during the Revolution. It was approached by means of a narrow, winding staircase, closed by a trap-door at the farther end of the kitchen.

When Berthine returned she was smiling mysteriously to herself. She gave the Germans her jug of cider.

Then she and her mother supped apart, at the other end of the kitchen.

The soldiers had finished eating, and were all six falling asleep as they sat round the table. Every now and then a forehead fell with a thud on the board, and the man, awakened suddenly, sat upright again.

Berthine said to the officer:

"Go and lie down, all of you, round the fire. There's lots of room for six. I'm going up to my room with my mother."

And the two women went upstairs. They could be heard locking the door and walking about overhead for a time; then they were silent.

The Prussians lay down on the floor, with their feet to the fire and their heads resting on their rolled-up cloaks. Soon all six snored loudly and uninterruptedly in six different keys.

They had been sleeping for some time when a shot rang out so loudly that it seemed directed against the very walls of the house. The soldiers rose hastily. Two—then three—more shots were fired.

The door opened hastily, and Berthine appeared, barefooted and only half dressed, with her candle in her hand and a scared look on her face.

"There are the French," she stammered; "at least two hundred of them. If they find you here they'll burn the house down. For God's sake, hurry down into the cellar, and don't make a sound, whatever you do. If you make any noise we are lost."

"We'll go, we'll go," replied the terrified officer. "Which is the way?"

The young woman hurriedly raised the small, square trap-door, and the six men disappeared one after another down the narrow, winding staircase, feeling their way as they went.

But as soon as the spike of the last helmet was out of sight Berthine lowered the heavy oaken lid —thick as a wall, hard as steel, furnished with the hinges and bolts of a prison cell—shot the two heavy bolts, and began to laugh long and silently, possessed with a mad longing to dance above the heads of her prisoners.

They made no sound, inclosed in the cellar as in a strong-box, obtaining air only from a small, iron-barred vent-hole.

Berthine lighted her fire again, hung the pot over it, and prepared more soup, saying to herself:

"Father will be tired to-night."

Then she sat and waited. The heavy pendulum of the clock swung to and fro with a monotonous tick.

Every now and then the young woman cast an impatient glance at the dial—a glance which seemed to say:

"I wish he'd be quick!"

But soon there was a sound of voices beneath her feet. Low, confused words reached her through the masonry which roofed the cellar. The Prussians were beginning to suspect the trick she had played them, and presently the officer came up the narrow staircase, and knocked at the trap-door.

"Open the door!" he cried.

"What do you want?" she said, rising from her seat and approaching the cellarway.

"Open the door!"

"I won't do any such thing!"

"Open it or I'll break it down!" shouted the man angrily.

She laughed.

"Hammer away, my good man! Hammer away!"

He struck with the butt-end of his gun at the closed oaken door. But it would have resisted a battering-ram.

The forester's daughter heard him go down the stairs again. Then the soldiers came one after another and tried their strength against the trap-door. But, finding their efforts useless, they all returned to the cellar and began to talk among themselves.

The young woman heard them for a short time, then she rose, opened the door of the house, looked out into the night, and listened.

A sound of distant barking reached her ear. She whistled just as a huntsman would, and almost immediately two great dogs emerged from the dark-

ness, and bounded to her side. She held them tight, and shouted at the top of her voice:

"Hullo, father!"

A far-off voice replied:

"Hullo, Berthine!"

She waited a few seconds, then repeated:

"Hullo, father!"

The voice, nearer now, replied:

"Hullo, Berthine!"

"Don't go in front of the vent-hole!" shouted his daughter. "There are Prussians in the cellar!"

Suddenly the man's tall figure could be seen to the left, standing between two tree trunks.

"Prussians in the cellar?" he asked anxiously. "What are they doing?"

The young woman laughed.

"They are the same as were here yesterday. They lost their way, and I've given them free lodgings in the cellar."

She told the story of how she had alarmed them by firing the revolver, and had shut them up.

The man, still serious, asked:

"But what am I to do with them at this time of night?"

"Go and fetch Monsieur Lavigne with his men," she replied. "He'll take them prisoners. He'll be delighted."

Her father smiled.

"So he will—delighted."

"Here's some soup for you," said his daughter. "Eat it quick, and then be off."

The old keeper sat down at the table, and began to eat his soup, having first filled two plates and put them on the floor for the dogs.

The Prussians, hearing voices, were silent.

Long-legs set off a quarter of an hour later, and Berthine, with her head between her hands, waited.

The prisoners began to make themselves heard again. They shouted, called, and beat furiously with the butts of their muskets against the rigid trap-door of the cellar.

Then they fired shots through the vent-hole, hoping, no doubt, to be heard by any German detachment which chanced to be passing that way.

The forester's daughter did not stir, but the noise irritated and unnerved her. Blind anger rose in her heart against the prisoners; she would have been only too glad to kill them all, and so silence them.

Then, as her impatience grew, she watched the clock, counting the minutes as they passed.

Her father had been gone an hour and a half. He must have reached the town by now. She conjured up a vision of him telling the story to Monsieur Lavigne, who grew pale with emotion, and rang for his servant to bring him his arms and uniform. She fancied she could hear the drum as it sounded the call to arms. Frightened faces appeared at the windows. The citizen-soldiers emerged from their houses half dressed, out of breath, buckling on their belts, and hurrying to the commandant's house.

Then the troop of soldiers, with Long-legs at its head, set forth through the night and the snow toward the forest.

She looked at the clock. "They may be here in an hour."

A nervous impatience possessed her. The min-

utes seemed interminable. Would the time never come?

At last the clock marked the moment she had fixed on for their arrival.

And she opened the door to listen for their approach. She perceived a shadowy form creeping toward the house. She was afraid, and cried out. But it was her father.

"They have sent me," he said, "to see if there is any change in the state of affairs."

"No—none."

Then he gave a shrill whistle. Soon a dark mass loomed up under the trees: the advance guard, composed of ten men.

"Don't go in front of the vent-hole!" repeated Long-legs at intervals.

And the first arrivals pointed out the much-dreaded vent-hole to those who came after.

At last the main body of the troop arrived, in all two hundred men, each carrying two hundred cartridges.

Monsieur Lavigne, in a state of intense excitement, posted them in such a fashion as to surround the whole house, save for a large space left vacant in front of the little hole on a level with the ground, through which the cellar derived its supply of air.

Monsieur Lavigne struck the trap-door a blow with his foot, and called:

"I wish to speak to the Prussian officer!"

The German did not reply.

"The Prussian officer!" again shouted the commandant.

Still no response. For the space of twenty minutes Monsieur Lavigne called on this silent officer to surrender with bag and baggage, promising him

that all lives should be spared, and that he and his men should be accorded military honors. But he could extort no sign, either of consent or of defiance. The situation became a puzzling one.

The citizen-soldiers kicked their heels in the snow, slapping their arms across their chest, as cab-drivers do, to warm themselves, and gazing at the vent-hole with a growing and childish desire to pass in front of it.

At last one of them took the risk—a man named Potdevin, who was fleet of limb. He ran like a deer across the zone of danger. The experiment succeeded. The prisoners gave no sign of life.

A voice cried:

"There's no one there!"

And another soldier crossed the open space before the dangerous vent-hole. Then this hazardous sport developed into a game. Every minute a man ran swiftly from one side to the other, like a boy playing baseball, kicking up the snow behind him as he ran. They had lighted big fires of dead wood at which to warm themselves, and the figures of the runners were illumined by the flames as they passed rapidly from the camp on the right to that on the left.

Some one shouted:

"It's your turn now, Maloison."

Maloison was a fat baker, whose corpulent person served to point many a joke among his comrades.

He hesitated. They chaffed him. Then, nerving himself to the effort, he set off at a little, waddling gait, which shook his fat paunch and made the whole detachment laugh till they cried.

"Bravo, bravo, Maloison!" they shouted.

He had accomplished about two-thirds of his journey when a long, crimson flame shot forth from the vent-hole. A loud report followed, and the fat baker fell face forward to the ground, uttering a frightful scream.

No one went to his assistance. Then he was seen to drag himself, groaning, on all-fours through the snow until he was beyond danger, when he fainted.

He was shot in the upper part of the thigh.

After the first surprise and fright were over they laughed at him again.

But Monsieur Lavigne appeared on the threshold of the forester's dwelling. He had formed his plan of attack. He called in a loud voice:

"I want Planchut, the plumber, and his workmen."

Three men approached.

"Take the eaves-troughs from the roof."

In a quarter of an hour they brought the commandant thirty yards of pipes.

Next, with infinite precaution, he had a small round hole drilled in the trap-door; then, making a conduit with the troughs from the pump to this opening, he said, with an air of extreme satisfaction:

"Now we'll give these German gentlemen something to drink."

A shout of frenzied admiration, mingled with uproarious laughter, burst from his followers. And the commandant organized relays of men, who were to relieve one another every five minutes. Then he commanded:

"Pump!"

And, the pump handle having been set in motion,

a stream of water trickled throughout the length of the piping, and flowed from step to step down the cellar stairs with a gentle, gurgling sound.

They waited.

An hour passed, then two, then three.

The commandant, in a state of feverish agitation, walked up and down the kitchen, putting his ear to the ground every now and then to discover, if possible, what the enemy were doing and whether they would soon capitulate.

The enemy were astir now. They could be heard moving the casks about, talking, splashing through the water.

Then, about eight o'clock in the morning, a voice said from the vent-hole:

"I want to speak to the French officer."

Lavigne replied from the window, taking care not to put his head out too far:

"Do you surrender?"

"I surrender."

"Then put your rifles outside."

A rifle immediately protruded from the hole, and fell into the snow, then another and another, until all were disposed of. And the voice which had spoken before said:

"I have no more. Be quick! I am drowned."

"Stop pumping!" ordered the commandant.

And the pump handle hung motionless.

Then, having filled the kitchen with armed and waiting soldiers, he slowly raised the oaken trap-door.

Four heads appeared, soaking wet, four fair heads with long, sandy hair, and one after another the six Germans emerged—scared, shivering, and dripping from head to foot.

They were seized and bound. Then, as the French feared a surprise, they set off at once in two convoys, one in charge of the prisoners, and the other conducting Maloison on a mattress borne on poles.

They made a triumphal entry into Rethel.

Monsieur Lavigne was decorated as a reward for having captured a Prussian advance guard, and the fat baker received the military medal for wounds received at the hands of the enemy.

A MEETING

IT was nothing but an accident, an accident pure and simple. On that particular evening the Princess's rooms were open, and as they appeared dark after the brilliantly lighted parlors, Baron d'Etraille, who was tired of standing, inadvertently wandered into an empty bedroom.

He looked round for a chair in which to have a doze, as he was sure his wife would not leave before daylight. As soon as he became accustomed to the light of the room he distinguished the big bed with its azure-and-gold hangings, in the middle of the great room, looking like a catafalque in which love was buried, for the Princess was no longer young. Behind it, a large bright surface looked like a lake seen at a distance. It was a large mirror, discreetly covered with dark drapery, that was very rarely let down, and seemed to look at the bed, which was its accomplice. One might almost fancy that it had reminiscences, and that one might see in it

charming female forms and the gentle movement of loving arms.

The Baron stood still for a moment, smiling, almost experiencing an emotion on the threshold of this chamber dedicated to love. But suddenly something appeared in the looking-glass, as if the phantoms which he had evoked had risen up before him. A man and a woman who had been sitting on a low couch concealed in the shadow had arisen, and the polished surface, reflecting their figures, showed that they were kissing each other before separating.

Baron d'Etraille recognized his wife and the Marquis de Cervigné. He turned and went away like a man who is fully master of himself, and waited till it was day before taking away the Baroness; but he had no longer any thoughts of sleeping.

As soon as they were alone he said:

"Madame, I saw you just now in Princesse de Raynes's room; I need say no more, and I am not fond either of reproaches, acts of violence, or of ridicule. As I wish to avoid all such things, we shall separate without any scandal. Our lawyers will settle your position according to my orders. You will be free to live as you please when you are no longer under my roof; but, as you will continue to bear my name, I must warn you that should any scandal arise I shall show myself inflexible."

She tried to speak, but he stopped her, bowed, and left the room.

He was more astonished and sad than unhappy. He had loved her dearly during the first period of their married life; but his ardor had cooled, and now he often amused himself elsewhere, either in a theater or in society, though he always preserved a certain liking for the Baroness.

She was very young, hardly four-and-twenty, small, slight—too slight—and very fair. She was a true Parisian doll: clever, spoiled, elegant, coquettish, witty, with more charm than real beauty. He used to say familiarly to his brother, when speaking of her:

"My wife is charming, attractive, but—there is nothing to lay hold of. She is like a glass of champagne that is all froth; when you get to the wine it is very good, but there is too little of it, unfortunately."

He walked up and down the room in great agitation, thinking of a thousand things. At one moment he was furious, and felt inclined to give the Marquis a good thrashing, or to slap his face publicly, in the club. But he decided that would not do, it would not be good form; he would be laughed at, and not his rival, and this thought wounded his vanity. So he went to bed, but could not sleep. Paris knew in a few days that the Baron and Baroness d'Etraille had agreed to an amicable separation on account of incompatibility of temper. No one suspected anything, no one laughed, and no one was astonished.

The Baron, however, to avoid meeting his wife, traveled for a year, then spent the summer at the seaside, and the autumn in shooting, returning to Paris for the winter. He did not meet the Baroness once.

He did not even know what people said about her. In any case, she took care to save appearances, and that was all he asked for.

He became dreadfully bored, traveled again, restored his old castle of Villebosc, which took him two years; then for over a year he entertained friends

there, till at last, tired of all these so-called pleasures, he returned to his mansion in the Rue de Lille, just six years after the separation.

He was now forty-five, with a good crop of gray hair, rather stout, and with that melancholy look characteristic of those who have been handsome, sought after, and liked, but who are deteriorating daily.

A month after his return to Paris he took cold on coming out of his club, and had such a bad cough that his medical man ordered him to Nice for the rest of the winter.

He reached the station only a few minutes before the departure of the train on Monday evening, and had barely time to get into a carriage, with only one other occupant, who was sitting in a corner so wrapped in furs and cloaks that he could not even make out whether it was a man or a woman, as nothing of the figure could be seen. When he perceived that he could not find out, he put on his traveling cap, rolled himself up in his rugs, and stretched out comfortably to sleep.

He did not wake until the day was breaking, and looked at once at his fellow-traveler, who had not stirred all night, and seemed still to be sound asleep.

M. d'Etraille made use of the opportunity to brush his hair and his beard, and to try to freshen himself up a little generally, for a night's travel does not improve one's appearance when one has attained a certain age.

A great poet has said:

"When we are young, our mornings are triumphant!"

Then we wake up with a cool skin, a bright eye, and glossy hair.

As one grows older one wakes up in a very different condition. Dull eyes, red, swollen cheeks, dry lips, hair and beard disarranged, impart an old, fatigued, worn-out look to the face.

The Baron opened his traveling case, and improved his looks as much as possible.

The engine whistled, the train stopped, and his neighbor moved. No doubt he was awake. They started off again, and then a slanting ray of sunlight shone into the carriage and on the sleeper, who moved again, shook himself, and then his face could be seen.

It was a young, fair, pretty, plump woman, and the Baron looked at her in amazement. He did not know what to think. He could really have sworn that it was his wife, but wonderfully changed for the better: stouter—why she had grown as stout as he was, only it suited her much better than it did him.

She looked at him calmly, did not seem to recognize him, and then slowly laid aside her wraps. She had that quiet assurance of a woman who is sure of herself, who feels that on awaking she is in her full beauty and freshness.

The Baron was really bewildered. Was it his wife, or else as like her as any sister could be? Not having seen her for six years, he might be mistaken.

She yawned, and this gesture betrayed her. She turned and looked at him again, calmly, indifferently, as if she scarcely saw him, and then looked out of the window again.

He was upset and dreadfully perplexed, and kept looking at her sideways.

Yes; it was surely his wife. How could he possibly have doubted? There could certainly not be

two noses like that, and a thousand recollections flashed through his mind. He felt the old feeling of the intoxication of love stealing over him, and he called to mind the sweet odor of her skin, her smile when she put her arms on his shoulders, the soft intonations of her voice, all her graceful, coaxing ways.

But how she had changed and improved! It was she and yet not she. She seemed riper, more developed, more of a woman, more seductive, more desirable, adorably desirable.

And this strange, unknown woman, whom he had accidentally met in a railway carriage, belonged to him; he had only to say to her:

"I insist upon it."

He had formerly slept in her arms, existed only in her love, and now he had found her again certainly, but so changed that he scarcely knew her. It was another, and yet it was she herself. It was some one who had been born and had formed and grown since he had left her. It was she, indeed; she whom he had loved, but who was now altered, with a more assured smile and greater self-possession. There were two women in one, mingling a great part of what was new and unknown with many sweet recollections of the past. There was something singular, disturbing, exciting about it—a kind of mystery of love in which there floated a delicious confusion. It was his wife in a new body and in new flesh which his lips had never pressed.

And he thought that in a few years nearly everything changes in us; only the outline can be recognized, and sometimes even that disappears.

The blood, the hair, the skin, all changes and is renewed, and when people have not seen each other

for a long time, when they meet they find each other totally different beings, although they are the same and bear the same name.

And the heart also can change. Ideas may be modified and renewed, so that in forty years of life we may, by gradual and constant transformations, become four or five totally new and different beings.

He dwelt on this thought till it troubled him; it had first taken possession of him when he surprised her in the Princess's room. He was not the least angry; it was not the same woman that he was looking at—that thin, excitable little doll of those days.

What was he to do? How should he address her? and what could he say to her? Had she recognized him?

The train stopped again. He got up, bowed, and said: "Bertha, do you want anything I could bring you? . . ."

She looked at him from head to foot, and answered, without showing the slightest surprise, or confusion, or anger, but with the most perfect indifference:

"I do not want anything—thank you."

He got out and walked up and down the platform a little in order to recover himself, and, as it were, to recover his senses after a fall. What should he do now? If he got into another carriage it would look as if he were running away. Should he be polite or importunate? That would look as if he were asking for forgiveness. Should he speak as if he were her master? He would look like a fool, and, besides, he really had no right to do so.

He got in again and took his place.

During his absence she had hastily arranged her

dress and hair, and was now lying stretched out on the seat, radiant, and without showing any emotion.

He turned to her, and said: "My dear Bertha, since this singular chance has brought us together after a separation of six years—a quite friendly separation—are we to continue to look upon each other as irreconcilable enemies? We are shut up together, *tête-â-tête,* which is so much the better or so much the worse. I am not going to get into another carriage, so don't you think it is preferable to talk as friends till the end of our journey?"

She answered, quite calmly again:

"Just as you please."

Then he suddenly stopped, really not knowing what to say; but as he had plenty of assurance, he sat down on the middle seat, and said:

"Well, I see I must pay my court to you; so much the better. It is, however, really a pleasure, for you are charming. You cannot imagine how you have improved in the last six years. I do not know any woman who could give me that delightful sensation which I experienced just now when you emerged from your wraps. I could really have thought such a change impossible. . . ."

Without moving her head or looking at him, she said: "I cannot say the same with regard to you; you have certainly deteriorated a great deal."

He got red and confused, and then, with a smile of resignation, he said:

"You are rather hard."

"Why?" was her reply. "I am only stating facts. I don't suppose you intend to offer me your love? It must, therefore, be a matter of perfect indifference to you what I think about you. But I see it is a painful subject, so let us talk of something

else. What have you been doing since I last saw you?"

He felt rather out of countenance, and stammered:

"I? I have traveled, shot, and grown old, as you see. And you?"

She said, quite calmly: "I have taken care of appearances, as you ordered me."

He was very nearly saying something brutal, but he checked himself, and kissed his wife's hand:

"And I thank you," he said.

She was surprised. He was indeed diplomatic, and always master of himself.

He went on: "As you have acceded to my first request, shall we now talk without any bitterness?"

She made a little movement of surprise.

"Bitterness? I don't feel any; you are a complete stranger to me; I am only trying to keep up a difficult conversation."

He was still looking at her, fascinated in spite of her harshness, and he felt seized with a brutal desire, the desire of the master.

Perceiving that she had hurt his feelings, she said:

"How old are you now? I thought you were younger than you look."

"I am forty-five;" and then he added: "I forgot to ask after Princesse de Raynes. Are you still intimate with her?"

She looked at him as if she hated him:

"Yes, I certainly am. She is very well, thank you."

They remained sitting side by side, agitated and irritated. Suddenly he said:

"My dear Bertha, I have changed my mind.

You are my wife, and I expect you to come with me to-day. You have, I think, improved both morally and physically, and I am going to take you back again. I am your husband, and it is my right to do so."

She was stupefied, and looked at him, trying to divine his thoughts; but his face was resolute and impenetrable.

"I am very sorry," she said, "but I have made other engagements."

"So much the worse for you," was his reply. "The law gives me the power, and I mean to use it."

They were nearing Marseilles, and the train whistled and slackened speed. The Baroness rose, carefully rolled up her wraps, and then, turning to her husband, said:

"My dear Raymond, do not make a bad use of this *tête-â-tête* which I had carefully prepared. I wished to take precautions, according to your advice, so that I might have nothing to fear from you or from other people, whatever might happen. You are going to Nice, are you not?"

"I shall go wherever you go."

"Not at all; just listen to me, and I am sure that you will leave me in peace. In a few moments, when we get to the station, you will see the Princesse de Raynes and Comtesse Hermit waiting for me with their husbands. I wished them to see us, and to know that we had spent the night together in the railway carriage. Don't be alarmed; they will tell it everywhere as a most surprising fact.

"I told you just now that I had most carefully followed your advice and saved appearances. Anything else does not matter, does it? Well, in order

to do so, I wished to be seen with you. You told me carefully to avoid any scandal, and I am avoiding it, for, I am afraid—I am afraid——"

She waited till the train had quite stopped, and as her friends ran up to open the carriage door, she said:

"I am afraid"—hesitating—"that there is another reason—*je suis enceinte.*"

The Princess stretched out her arms to embrace her, and the Baroness said, pointing to the Baron, who was dumb with astonishment, and was trying to get at the truth:

"You do not recognize Raymond? He has certainly changed a good deal, and he agreed to come with me so that I might not travel alone. We take little trips like this occasionally, like good friends who cannot live together. We are going to separate here; he has had enough of me already."

She put out her hand, which he took mechanically, and then she jumped out on to the platform among her friends, who were waiting for her.

The Baron hastily shut the carriage door, for he was too much disturbed to say a word or come to any determination. He heard his wife's voice, and their merry laughter as they went away.

He never saw her again, nor did he ever discover whether she had told him a lie or was speaking the truth.

FORGIVENESS

SHE had been brought up in one of those families who live entirely to themselves, apart from all the rest of the world. Such families know nothing of political events, although they are discussed at table; for changes in the Government take place at such a distance from them that they are spoken of as one speaks of a historical event, such as the death of Louis XVI or the landing of Napoleon.

Customs are modified in course of time, fashions succeed one another, but such variations are taken no account of in the placid family circle where traditional usages prevail year after year. And if

some scandalous episode or other occurs in the neighborhood the disreputable story dies a natural death when it reaches the threshold of the house. The father and mother may, perhaps, exchange a few words on the subject when alone together some evening, but they speak in hushed tones—for even walls have ears. The father says, with bated breath:

"You've heard of that terrible affair in the Rivoil family?"

And the mother answers:

"Who would have dreamed of such a thing? It's dreadful."

The children suspect nothing, and arrive in their turn at years of discretion with eyes and mind blindfolded, ignorant of the more real side of life, not knowing that people do not think as they speak, and do not speak as they act; or aware that they should live at war, or at all events in a state of armed peace, with the rest of mankind; not suspecting the fact that the simple are always deceived, the sincere made sport of, the good maltreated.

Some go on till the day of their death in this blind probity and loyalty and honor, so pure-minded that nothing can open their eyes.

Others, undeceived but without fully understanding, make mistakes, are dismayed, and become desperate, believing themselves the playthings of a cruel fate, the wretched victims of adverse circumstances, and exceptionally wicked men.

The Savignols married their daughter Bertha at the age of eighteen. She wedded a young Parisian, George Baron by name, who had dealings on the Stock Exchange. He was handsome, well-mannered, and apparently all that could be desired.

But in the depths of his heart he somewhat despised his old-fashioned parents-in-law, whom he spoke of among his intimates as "my dear old fossils."

He belonged to a good family, and the girl was rich. They settled down in Paris.

She became one of those provincial Parisians whose name is legion. She remained in complete ignorance of the great city, of its social side, its pleasures and its customs—just as she remained ignorant also of life, its perfidy and its mysteries.

Devoted to her house, she knew scarcely anything beyond her own street; and when she ventured into another part of Paris it seemed to her that she had accomplished a long and arduous journey into some unknown, unexplored city. She would then say to her husband in the evening:

"I have been through the boulevards to-day."

Two or three times a year her husband took her to the theater. These were events the remembrance of which never grew dim; they provided subjects of conversation for long afterward.

Sometimes three months afterward she would suddenly burst into laughter, and exclaim:

"Do you remember that actor dressed up as a general, who crowed like a cock?"

Her friends were limited to two families related to her own. She spoke of them as "the Martinets" and "the Michelins."

Her husband lived as he pleased, coming home when it suited him—sometimes not until dawn—alleging business, but not putting himself out overmuch to account for his movements, well aware that no suspicion would ever enter his wife's guileless soul.

But one day she received an anonymous letter.

She was thunderstruck—too simple-minded to understand the infamy of unsigned information and to despise the letter, the writer of which declared himself inspired by interest in her happiness, hatred of evil, and love of truth.

This missive told her that her husband had, for two years past, a sweetheart, a young widow named Madame Rosset, with whom he spent his evenings.

Bertha knew neither how to dissemble her grief nor how to spy on her husband. When he came in for lunch she threw the letter down before him, burst into tears, and fled to her room.

He had time to take in the situation and to prepare his reply. He knocked at his wife's door. She opened it at once, but dared not look at him. He smiled, sat down, drew her to his knee, and in a tone of light raillery began:

"My dear child, as a matter of fact, I have a friend named Madame Rosset, whom I have known for the last ten years, and of whom I have a very high opinion. I may add that I know scores of other people whose names I have never mentioned to you, seeing that you do not care for society, or fresh acquaintances, or functions of any sort. But, to make short work of such vile accusations as this, I want you to put on your things after lunch, and we'll go together and call on this lady, who will very soon become a friend of yours too, I am quite sure."

She embraced her husband warmly, and, moved by that feminine spirit of curiosity which will not be lulled once it is aroused, consented to go and see this unknown widow, of whom she was, in spite of everything, just the least bit jealous. She felt instinctively that to know a danger is to be already armed against it.

She entered a small, tastefully furnished flat on the fourth floor of an attractive house. After waiting five minutes in a drawing-room rendered somewhat dark by its many curtains and hangings, a door opened, and a very dark, short, rather plump young woman appeared, surprised and smiling.

George introduced them:

"My wife—Madame Julie Rosset."

The young widow uttered a half-suppressed cry of astonishment and joy, and ran forward with hands outstretched. She had not hoped, she said, to have this pleasure, knowing that Madame Baron never saw any one, but she was delighted to make her acquaintance. She was so fond of George (she said "George" in a familiar, sisterly sort of way) that she had been most anxious to know his young wife and to make friends with her, too.

By the end of a month the two new friends were inseparable. They saw each other every day, sometimes twice a day, and dined together every evening, sometimes at one house, sometimes at the other. George no longer deserted his home, no longer talked of pressing business. He adored his own fireside, he said.

When, after a time, a flat in the house where

Madame Rosset lived became vacant Madame Baron hastened to take it, in order to be near her friend and spend even more time with her than hitherto.

And for two whole years their friendship was without a cloud, a friendship of heart and mind—absolute, tender, devoted. Bertha could hardly speak without bringing in Julie's name. To her Madame Rosset represented perfection.

She was utterly happy, calm, and contented.

But Madame Rosset fell ill. Bertha hardly left her side. She spent her nights with her, distracted with grief; even her husband seemed inconsolable.

One morning the doctor, after leaving the invalid's bedside, took George and his wife aside, and told them that he considered Julie's condition very grave.

As soon as he had gone the grief-stricken husband and wife sat down opposite each other and gave way to tears. That night they both sat up with the patient. Bertha tenderly kissed her friend from time to time, while George stood at the foot of the bed, his eyes obstinately fixed on the invalid's face.

The next day she was worse.

But toward evening she declared she felt better, and insisted that her friends should go back to their own apartment to dinner.

They were sitting sadly in the dining-room, scarcely even attempting to eat, when the maid gave George a note. He opened it, turned pale as death, and, rising from the table, said to his wife in a constrained voice:

"Wait for me. I must leave you a moment. I shall be back in ten minutes. Don't go away on any account."

And he hurried to his room to get his hat.

Bertha waited for him, a prey to fresh anxiety. But, docile in everything, she would not go back to her friend till he returned.

At length, as he did not reappear, it occurred to her to visit his room and see if he had taken his gloves. This would show whether or not he had had a call to make.

She saw them at the first glance. Beside them lay a crumpled paper, evidently thrown down in haste.

She recognized it at once as the note George had received.

And a burning temptation, the first that had ever assailed her, urged her to read it and discover the cause of her husband's abrupt departure. Her rebellious conscience protested, but a devouring and fearful curiosity prevailed. She seized the paper, smoothed it out, recognized the tremulous, penciled writing as Julie's, and read:

"Come alone and kiss me, my poor dear. I am dying."

At first she did not understand, the idea of Julie's death being her uppermost thought. But all at once the true meaning of what she read burst in a flash upon her; this penciled note threw a lurid light upon her whole existence, revealed the whole infamous truth, all the treachery and perfidy of which she had been the victim. She understood the long years of deceit, the way in which she had been made their puppet. She saw them again, sitting side by side in the evening, reading by lamplight out of the same book, glancing at each other at the end of each page.

And her poor, indignant, suffering, bleeding

heart was cast into the depths of a despair which knew no bounds.

Footsteps drew near; she fled, and shut herself in her own room.

Presently her husband called her:

"Come quickly! Madame Rosset is dying."

Bertha appeared at her door, and with trembling lips replied:

"Go back to her alone; she does not need me."

He looked at her stupidly, dazed with grief, and repeated:

"Come at once! She's dying, I tell you!"

Bertha answered:

"You would rather it were I."

Then at last he understood, and returned alone to the dying woman's bedside.

He mourned her openly, shamelessly, indifferent to the sorrow of the wife who no longer spoke to him, no longer looked at him; who passed her life in solitude, hedged round with disgust, with indignant anger, and praying night and day to God.

They still lived in the same house, however, and sat opposite each other at table, in silence and despair.

Gradually his sorrow grew less acute; but she did not forgive him.

And so their life went on, hard and bitter for them both.

For a whole year they remained as complete strangers to each other as if they had never met. Bertha nearly lost her reason.

At last one morning she went out very early, and returned about eight o'clock bearing in her hands an enormous bouquet of white roses.

And she sent word to her husband that she wanted to speak to him.

He came—anxious and uneasy.

"We are going out together," she said. "Please carry these flowers; they are too heavy for me."

A carriage took them to the gate of the cemetery, where they alighted. Then, her eyes filling with tears, she said to George:

"Take me to her grave."

He trembled, and could not understand her motive; but he led the way, still carrying the flowers. At last he stopped before a white marble slab, to which he pointed without a word.

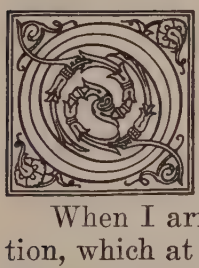
She took the bouquet from him, and, kneeling down, placed it on the grave. Then she offered up a silent, heartfelt prayer.

Behind her stood her husband, overcome by recollections of the past.

She rose, and held out her hands to him.

"If you wish it, we will be friends," she said.

AN UNCOMFORTABLE BED



NE autumn I went to spend the hunting season with some friends in a château in Picardy.

My friends were fond of practical jokes. I do not care to know people who are not.

When I arrived, they gave me a princely reception, which at once awakened suspicion in my mind. They fired off rifles, embraced me, made much of me, as if they expected to have great fun at my expense.

I said to myself:

"Look out, old ferret! They have something in store for you."

During the dinner the mirth was excessive, exaggerated, in fact. I thought: "Here are people who have more than their share of amusement, and apparently without reason.

They must have planned some good joke. Assuredly I am to be the victim of the joke. Attention!"

During the entire evening every one laughed in an exaggerated fashion. I scented a practical joke in the air, as a dog scents game. But what was it? I was watchful, restless. I did not let a word, or a meaning, or a gesture escape me. Every one seemed to me an object of suspicion, and I even looked distrustfully at the faces of the servants.

The hour struck for retiring, and the whole household came to escort me to my room. Why? They called to me: "Good night." I entered the apartment, shut the door, and remained standing, without moving a single step, holding the wax candle in my hand.

I heard laughter and whispering in the corridor. Without doubt they were spying on me. I cast a glance around the walls, the furniture, the ceiling, the hangings, the floor. I saw nothing to justify suspicion. I heard persons moving about outside my door. I had no doubt they were looking through the keyhole.

An idea came into my head: "My candle may suddenly go out and leave me in darkness."

Then I went across to the mantelpiece and lighted all the wax candles that were on it. After that I cast another glance around me without discovering anything. I advanced with short steps, carefully examining the apartment. Nothing. I inspected every article, one after the other. Still nothing. I went over to the window. The shutters, large wooden shutters, were open. I shut them with great care, and then drew the curtains, enormous velvet curtains, and placed a chair in front of them, so as to have nothing to fear from outside.

Then I cautiously sat down. The armchair was solid. I did not venture to get into the bed. However, the night was advancing; and I ended by coming to the conclusion that I was foolish. If they were spying on me, as I supposed, they must, while waiting for the success of the joke they had been preparing for me, have been laughing immoderately at my terror. So I made up my mind to go to bed. But the bed was particularly suspicious-looking. I pulled at the curtains. They seemed to be secure. All the same, there was danger. I was going perhaps to receive a cold shower bath from overhead, or perhaps, the moment I stretched myself out, to find myself sinking to the floor with my mattress. I searched in my memory for all the practical jokes of which I ever had experience. And I did not want to be caught. Ah! certainly not! certainly not! Then I suddenly bethought myself of a precaution which I considered insured safety. I caught hold of the side of the mattress gingerly, and very slowly drew it toward me. It came away, followed by the sheet and the rest of the bedclothes. I dragged all these objects into the very middle of the room, facing the entrance door. I made my bed over again as best I could at some distance from the suspected bedstead and the corner which had filled me with such anxiety. Then I extinguished all the candles, and, groping my way, I slipped under the bedclothes.

For at least another hour I remained awake, starting at the slightest sound. Everything seemed quiet in the château. I fell asleep.

I must have been in a deep sleep for a long time, but all of a sudden I was awakened with a start by the fall of a heavy body tumbling right on top

of my own, and, at the same time, I received on my face, on my neck, and on my chest a burning liquid which made me utter a howl of pain. And a dreadful noise, as if a sideboard laden with plates and dishes had fallen down, almost deafened me.

I was smothering beneath the weight that was crushing me and preventing me from moving. I stretched out my hand to find out what was the nature of this object. I felt a face, a nose, and whiskers. Then, with all my strength, I launched out a blow at this face. But I immediately received a hail of cuffings which made me jump straight out of the soaked sheets, and rush in my nightshirt into the corridor, the door of which I found open.

Oh, heavens! it was broad daylight. The noise brought my friends hurrying into the apartment, and we found, sprawling over my improvised bed, the dismayed valet, who, while bringing me my morning cup of tea, had tripped over this obstacle in the middle of the floor and fallen on his stomach, spilling my breakfast over my face in spite of himself.

The precautions I had taken in closing the shutters and going to sleep in the middle of the room had only brought about the practical joke I had been trying to avoid.

Oh, how they all laughed that day!

WAS IT A DREAM?

I LOVED her madly! Why does one love? Why does one love? How strange it is to see but one being in the world, to have but one thought in one's mind, one desire in the heart, and one name on the lips; a name that comes up continually, rising from the depths of the soul like water in a spring, and which one repeats over and over again, and murmurs ceaselessly everywhere, like a prayer.

"I am not going to tell you our story. Love is always the same. I met her and loved her; that is all. And for a whole year I lived in her tenderness, her caresses, in her arms, hung on her words and looks, loved her dresses, was so completely wrapped up, bound, imprisoned in everything that pertained to her that I no longer knew whether it was day or night, if I was dead or alive, on this old earth of ours or elsewhere.

"And then she died. How? I do not know;

I no longer know. But one evening she came home wet, for it was raining heavily, and the next day she coughed, and she coughed for about a week, and took to her bed. What happened I do not remember now; but doctors came, wrote prescriptions, and went away. Medicines were brought, and a woman made her drink them. Her hands were hot, her forehead was burning, and her eyes bright and sad. When I spoke to her she answered me, but I do not remember what we said. I have forgotten everything, everything, everything! She died, and I very well remember her little faint sigh—her last. The nurse said: 'Ah!' and I understood, I understood!

"I knew nothing more, nothing. I saw a priest, who said: 'Your sweetheart?' and it seemed to me as if he were insulting her. As she was dead, nobody had the right to know our relationship, and I turned him out. Another came who was very kind and tender, and I shed tears when he spoke to me about her.

"They consulted me about the funeral, but I do not remember anything that they said, though I distinctly recall the coffin and the strokes of the hammer as they nailed her down in it. Oh! God, God!

"She was buried! Buried! She! In that hole! Some people came—female friends. I made my escape, and ran away; I ran, and then I walked, through the streets, and finally went home. The next day I started on a journey.

* * * * * * *

"Yesterday I returned to Paris, and when I saw my room again—our room, our bed, our furniture,

everything that remains of the life of a human being after death—I was seized by such a violent recurrence of grief that I came very near opening the window and throwing myself out into the street. As I could no longer remain in the midst of these things, between these walls which had inclosed and sheltered her, and which retained a thousand atoms of her, of her skin and of her breath, in their imperceptible crevices, I took up my hat to make my escape, and just as I reached the door I passed the large glass in the hall, which she had put there so that she could look at herself every day from head to foot as she went out, to see if her toilet was in order, and was correct and pretty, from her little boots to her hat.

"And I stopped short in front of that looking-glass in which she had so often been reflected—so often, so often that it also must have retained her reflection. I was standing there, trembling, with my eyes fixed on the glass—on that flat, profound, empty glass—which had contained her entirely, and had possessed her as much as I had, as my passionate looks had. I felt as if I loved that glass. I touched it; it was cold. Oh, the recollection! Sorrowful mirror, burning mirror, live mirror, horrible mirror, which makes us suffer such torments! Happy are the men whose heart is like a mirror where images glide and pass away; that forgets all it has contained, reflected, all that have basked in its love and affection! But I, how I suffer!

"I went out and, without knowing it, without wishing it, walked to the cemetery. I found her simple grave, a white marble cross, with these few words:

"'*She loved, was beloved, and died.*'

"She was there, beneath the ground, decomposed! How horrible! I sobbed, with my forehead to the ground. I remained there a long time, a long time. Then I saw that it was getting dark, and a strange, mad wish, the desire of a despairing lover, seized me. I wished to pass the night, the last night, in weeping on her grave. But I should be seen and driven out. How was I to manage? I was cunning, so I got up and began to roam about that city of the dead. I walked and walked. How small this city is, in comparison with the other, the city in which we live! And yet, how much more numerous the dead are than the living. We require high houses, wide streets, and much room for the four generations who see the daylight at the same time, drink water from the spring, wine from the vines, and eat the bread from the plains.

"And for all the generations of the dead, for all that ladder of humanity that has descended to us, there is scarcely anything, only a field, scarcely anything! The earth takes them back, oblivion effaces them. Adieu!

"At the end of this cemetery I suddenly perceived the abandoned cemetery where the dead have long since blended with the soil, where the crosses themselves decay, where the last comers will be put to-morrow. It is full of untended roses, of robust, dark cypress trees, a sad and beautiful garden, nourished on human flesh.

"I was alone, perfectly alone. I hid in a leafy tree, and concealed myself completely among the thick and somber branches, and waited, clinging to the trunk, as a shipwrecked man does to a plank.

"When it was quite dark I left my refuge and began to walk softly, slowly, noiselessly through

that ground full of dead people, and I wandered about for a long time, but could not find her again. I went on with extended arms, knocking against the tombs with my hands, my feet, my knees, my chest, even with my head, without being able to find her. I touched and felt about like a blind man groping his way. I felt the stones, the crosses, the iron railings, the metal wreaths, and the wreaths of faded flowers! I read the names with my fingers, by passing them over the letters. What a night! What a night! I could not find her again!

"There was no moon. What a night! I was afraid, horribly afraid in these narrow paths, between two rows of graves. Graves! graves! graves! nothing but graves! On my right, on my left, in front of me, around me, everywhere there were graves! I sat down on one of them, for I could not walk any longer, my knees were so weak. I could hear my heart beat! And I could hear something else as well. What? A confused, nameless noise. Was the noise in my head, in the impenetrable night, or beneath the mysterious earth, the earth sown with human corpses? I looked about me, but I cannot say how long I remained there; I was paralyzed with terror, drunk with fright, ready to shout out, ready to die.

"Suddenly it seemed to me as if the slab of marble on which I was sitting was moving. Certainly, it was moving, as if it were being raised. With a bound I sprang on to the neighboring tomb, and I saw, yes, I distinctly saw the stone which I had just left standing upright, and the dead person appeared, a naked skeleton, that was pushing the stone back with its bent back. I saw it clearly, although the night was dark. On the cross I read:

"'*Here lies Jacques Olivant, who died at the age of fifty-one. He loved his family, was kind and honorable, and died in the peace of the Lord.*'

"The dead man also read what was inscribed on his tombstone; then he picked up a stone off the path, a little, pointed stone, and began to scrape the letters carefully. He slowly effaced them altogether, and with the hollows of his eyes he looked at the places where they had been engraved, and, with the tip of the bone that had been his forefinger he wrote in luminous letters, like those lines which one traces on walls with the tip of a lucifer match:

"'*Here reposes Jacques Olivant, who died at the age of fifty-one. He hastened his father's death by his unkindness, as he wished to inherit his fortune; he tortured his wife, tormented his children, deceived his neighbors, robbed every one he could, and died wretched.*'

"When he had finished writing the dead man stood motionless, looking at his work, and on turning round I saw that all the graves were open, that all the dead bodies had emerged from them, and that all had effaced the lies inscribed on the gravestones by their relations, and had substituted the truth instead. And I saw that all had been the tormentors of their neighbors—malicious, dishonest, hypocrites, liars, rogues, calumniators, envious; that they had stolen, deceived, performed every disgraceful, every abominable action, these good fathers, these faithful wives, these devoted sons, these chaste young girls, these honest tradesmen, these men and women who were called irreproachable. And they were all writing at the same time, on the threshold of their eternal abode, the truth, the

cruel, terrible, and holy truth which every one on earth is ignorant of, or pretends to ignore.

"I thought that *she* also must have written something on her tombstone, and now, running without any fear among the half-open coffins, among the corpses and skeletons, I went toward her, sure that I should find her immediately. I recognized her at once, without seeing her face, which was covered by the winding sheet, and on the marble cross, where shortly before I had read: *'She loved, was beloved, and died,'* I now read: *'Having gone out one day, in order to deceive her lover, she caught cold in the rain and died.'*

* * * * * * *

"It appears that they found me at daybreak lying on the grave unconscious."

A COWARD

IN society he was called "Handsome Signoles." His name was Vicomte Gontran-Joseph de Signoles.

An orphan, and possessed of an ample fortune, he cut quite a dash, as it is called. He had an attractive appearance and manner, could talk well, had a certain inborn elegance, an air of pride and nobility, a good mustache, and a tender eye, that always finds favor with women.

He was in great request at receptions, waltzed to perfection, and was regarded by his own sex with that smiling hostility accorded to the popular society man. He had been suspected of more than one love affair, calculated to enhance the reputation of a bachelor. He lived a happy, peaceful life—a life of physical and mental well-being. He had won considerable fame as a swordsman, and still more as a marksman.

"When the time comes for me to fight a duel,"

he said, "I shall choose pistols. With such a weapon I am sure to kill my man."

One evening, having accompanied two women friends of his with their husbands to the theater, he invited them to take some ice-cream at Tortoni's after the performance. They had been seated a few minutes in the restaurant when Signoles noticed that a man was staring persistently at one of the ladies. She seemed annoyed, and lowered her eyes. At last she said to her husband:

"There's a man over there looking at me. I don't know him; do you?"

The husband, who had noticed nothing, glanced across at the offender, and said:

"No; not in the least."

His wife continued, half smiling, half angry:

"It's very tiresome! He quite spoils my ice cream."

The husband shrugged his shoulders.

"Nonsense! Don't take any notice of him. If we were to bother our heads about all the ill-mannered people we should have no time for anything else."

But the Viscount abruptly left his seat. He could not allow this insolent fellow to spoil an ice for a guest of his. It was for him to take cognizance of the offence, since it was through him that his friends had come to the restaurant. He went across to the man and said:

"Sir, you are staring at those ladies in a manner I cannot permit. I must ask you to desist from your rudeness."

The other replied:

"Let me alone, will you!"

"Take care, sir," said the Viscount between his

teeth, " or you will force me to extreme measures."

The man replied with a single word—a foul word, which could be heard from one end of the restaurant to the other, and which startled every one there. All those whose backs were toward the two disputants turned round; all the others raised their heads; three waiters spun round on their heels like tops; the two lady cashiers jumped, as if shot, then turned their bodies simultaneously, like two automata worked by the same spring.

There was dead silence. Then suddenly a sharp, crisp sound. The Viscount had slapped his adversary's face. Every one rose to interfere. Cards were exchanged.

When the Viscount reached home he walked rapidly up and down his room for some minutes. He was in a state of too great agitation to think connectedly. One idea alone possessed him: a duel. But this idea aroused in him as yet no emotion of any kind. He had done what he was bound to do; he had proved himself to be what he ought to be. He would be talked about, approved, congratulated. He repeated aloud, speaking as one does when under the stress of great mental disturbance:

" What a brute of a man! "

Then he sat down, and began to reflect. He would have to find seconds as soon as morning came. Whom should he choose? He bethought himself of the most influential and best-known men of his acquaintance. His choice fell at last on the Marquis de la Tour-Noire and Colonel Bourdin—a nobleman and a soldier. That would be just the thing. Their names would carry weight in the newspapers. He was thirsty, and drank three glasses of water, one after another; then he walked up and down

again. If he showed himself brave, determined, prepared to face a duel in deadly earnest, his adversary would probably draw back and proffer excuses.

He picked up the card he had taken from his pocket and thrown on a table. He read it again, as he had already read it, first at a glance in the restaurant, and afterward on the way home in the light of each gas lamp: "Georges Lamil, 51 Rue Moncey." That was all.

He examined closely this collection of letters, which seemed to him mysterious, fraught with many meanings. Georges Lamil! Who was the man? What was his profession? Why had he stared so at the woman? Was it not monstrous that a stranger, an unknown, should thus all at once upset one's whole life, simply because it had pleased him to stare rudely at a woman? And the Viscount once more repeated aloud:

"What a brute!"

Then he stood motionless, thinking, his eyes still fixed on the card. Anger rose in his heart against this scrap of paper—a resentful anger, mingled with a strange sense of uneasiness. It was a stupid business altogether! He took up a penknife which lay open within reach, and deliberately stuck it into the middle of the printed name, as if he were stabbing some one.

So he would have to fight! Should he choose swords or pistols?—for he considered himself as the insulted party. With the sword he would risk less, but with the pistol there was some chance of his adversary backing out. A duel with swords is rarely fatal, since mutual prudence prevents the combatants from fighting close enough to each other for a

point to enter very deep. With pistols he would seriously risk his life; but, on the other hand, he might come out of the affair with flying colors, and without a duel, after all.

"I must be firm," he said.

The sound of his own voice startled him, and he looked nervously round the room. He felt unstrung. He drank another glass of water, and then began undressing, preparatory to going to bed.

As soon as he was in bed he blew out the light and shut his eyes.

"I have all day to-morrow," he reflected, "for setting my affairs in order. I must sleep now, in order to be calm when the time comes."

He was very warm in bed, but he could not succeed in losing consciousness. He tossed and turned, remained for five minutes lying on his back, then changed to his left side, then rolled over to his right.

He was thirsty again, and rose to drink. Then a qualm seized him:

"Can it be possible that I am afraid?"

Why did his heart beat so uncontrollably at every well-known sound in his room? When the clock was about to strike, the prefatory grating of its spring made him start, and for several seconds he panted for breath, so unnerved was he.

He began to reason with himself on the possibility of such a thing:

"Could I by any chance be afraid?"

No, indeed; he could not be afraid, since he was resolved to proceed to the last extremity, since he was irrevocably determined to fight without flinching. And yet he was so perturbed in mind and body that he asked himself:

"Is it possible to be afraid in spite of one's self?"

And this doubt, this fearful question, took possession of him. If an irresistible power, stronger than his own will, were to quell his courage what would happen? He would certainly go to the place appointed; his will would force him that far. But supposing, when there, he were to tremble or faint? And he thought of his social standing, his reputation, his name.

And he suddenly determined to get up and look at himself in the glass. He lighted his candle. When he saw his face reflected in the mirror he scarcely recognized it. He seemed to see before him a man whom he did not know. His eyes looked disproportionately large, and he was very pale.

He remained standing before the mirror. He put out his tongue, as if to examine the state of his health, and all at once the thought flashed into his mind:

"At this time the day after to-morrow I may be dead."

And his heart throbbed painfully.

"At this time the day after to-morrow I may be dead. This person in front of me, this 'I' whom I see in the glass, will perhaps be no more. What! Here I am, I look at myself, I feel myself to be alive —and yet in twenty-four hours I may be lying on that bed, with closed eyes, dead, cold, inanimate."

He turned round, and could see himself distinctly lying on his back on the couch he had just quitted. He had the hollow face and the limp hands of death.

Then he became afraid of his bed, and to avoid seeing it went to his smoking-room. He mechanically took a cigar, lighted it, and began walking back

and forth. He was cold; he took a step toward the bell, to wake his valet, but stopped with hand raised toward the bell rope.

"He would see that I am afraid!"

And, instead of ringing, he made a fire himself. His hands quivered nervously as they touched various objects. His head grew dizzy, his thoughts confused, disjointed, painful; a numbness seized his spirit, as if he had been drinking.

And all the time he kept on saying:

"What shall I do? What will become of me?"

His whole body trembled spasmodically; he rose, and, going to the window, drew back the curtains.

The day—a summer day—was breaking. The pink sky cast a glow on the city, its roofs, and its walls. A flush of light enveloped the awakened world, like a caress from the rising sun, and the glimmer of dawn kindled new hope in the breast of the Viscount. What a fool he was to let himself succumb to fear before anything was decided—before his seconds had interviewed those of Georges Lamil, before he even knew whether he would have to fight or not!

He made his toilet, dressed, and left the house with a firm step.

He repeated as he went:

"I must be firm—very firm. I must show that I am not afraid."

His seconds, the Marquis and the Colonel, placed themselves at his disposal, and, having shaken him warmly by the hand, began to discuss details.

"You want a serious duel?" asked the Colonel.

"Yes—quite serious," replied the Viscount.

"You insist on pistols?" put in the Marquis.

"Yes."

"Do you leave all the other arrangements in our hands?"

With a dry, jerky voice the Viscount answered:

"Twenty paces—at a given signal—the arm to be raised, not lowered—shots to be exchanged until one or other is seriously wounded."

"Excellent conditions," declared the Colonel in a satisfied tone. "You are a good shot; all the chances are in your favor."

And they parted. The Viscount returned home to wait for them. His agitation, only temporarily allayed, now increased momentarily. He felt, in arms, legs, and chest, a sort of trembling—a continuous vibration; he could not stay still, either sitting or standing. His mouth was parched, and he made every now and then a clicking movement of the tongue, as if to detach it from his palate.

He attempted to take luncheon, but could not eat. Then it occurred to him to seek courage in drink, and he sent for a decanter of rum, of which he swallowed, one after another, six small glasses.

A burning warmth, followed by a deadening of the mental faculties, ensued. He said to himself:

"I know how to manage. Now it will be all right!"

But at the end of an hour he had emptied the decanter, and his agitation was worse than ever. A mad longing possessed him to throw himself on the ground, to bite, to scream. Night fell.

A ring at the bell so unnerved him that he had not the strength to rise to receive his seconds.

He dared not even speak to them, wish them good day, utter a single word, lest his changed voice should betray him.

"All is arranged as you wished," said the Colo-

nel. "Your adversary claimed at first the privileges of the offended party; but he yielded almost at once, and accepted your conditions. His seconds are two military men."

"Thank you," said the Viscount.

The Marquis added:

"Please excuse us if we do not stay now, for we have a good deal to see to yet. We shall want a reliable doctor, since the duel is not to end until a serious wound has been inflicted; and you know that bullets are not to be trifled with. We must select a spot near some house to which the wounded party can be carried if necessary. In fact, the arrangements will take us another two or three hours at least."

The Viscount articulated for the second time:

"Thank you."

"You're all right?" asked the Colonel. "Quite calm?"

"Perfectly calm, thank you."

The two men withdrew.

When he was once more alone he felt as though he should go mad. His servant having lighted the lamps, he sat down at his table to write some letters. When he had traced at the top of a sheet of paper the words: "This is my last will and testament," he started from his seat, feeling himself incapable of connected thought, of decision in regard to anything.

So he was going to fight! He could no longer avoid it. What, then, possessed him? He wished to fight, he was fully determined to fight, and yet, in spite of all his mental effort, in spite of the exertion of all his will power, he felt that he could not even preserve the strength necessary to carry

him through the ordeal. He tried to conjure up a picture of the duel, his own attitude, and that of his enemy.

Every now and then his teeth chattered audibly. He thought he would read, and took down Châteauvillard's *Rules of Dueling*. Then he said:

"Is the other man practised in the use of the pistol? Is he well known? How can I find out?"

He remembered Baron de Vaux's book on marksmen, and searched it from end to end. Georges Lamil was not mentioned. And yet, if he were not an adept, would he have accepted without demur such a dangerous weapon and such deadly conditions?

He opened a case of Gastinne Renettes which stood on a small table, and took from it a pistol. Next he stood in the correct attitude for firing, and raised his arm. But he was trembling from head to foot, and the weapon shook in his grasp.

Then he said to himself:

"It is impossible. I cannot fight like this."

He looked at the little black, death-spitting hole at the end of the pistol; he thought of dishonor, of the whispers at the clubs, the smiles in his friends' drawing-rooms, the contempt of women, the veiled sneers of the newspapers, the insults that would be hurled at him by cowards.

He still looked at the weapon, and, raising the hammer, saw the glitter of the priming below it. The pistol had been left loaded by some chance, some oversight. And the discovery rejoiced him, he knew not why.

If he did not maintain, in presence of his opponent, the steadfast bearing which was so necessary to his honor, he would be ruined forever. He would be branded, stigmatized as a coward, hounded

out of society! And he felt, he knew, that he could not maintain that calm, unmoved demeanor. And yet he was brave, since—the thought that followed was not even rounded to a finish in his mind; but, opening his mouth wide, he suddenly plunged the barrel of the pistol as far back as his throat, and pressed the trigger.

When the valet, alarmed at the report, rushed into the room he found his master lying dead upon his back. A spurt of blood had splashed the white paper on the table, and had made a great crimson stain beneath the words:

"This is my last will and testament."

MARGOT'S TAPERS

I

MARGOT FRESQUYL had for the first time allowed herself to be tempted by the delicious intoxication of the mortal sin of loving, on the evening of Midsummer Day.

While most of the young people were holding each others' hands and dancing in a circle round the burning logs, the girl had slyly taken the deserted road which led to the wood, leaning on the arm of her partner, a tall, vigorous farm servant, whose Christian name was Tiennou, which, by the way, was the only name he had borne from his birth. For he was entered on the register of births with this curt note: "Father and mother unknown." He had been found on St. Stephen's Day under a shed on a farm, where some poor, despairing wretch had abandoned him, perhaps even without turning her head round to look at him.

For months Tiennou had madly worshiped that fair, pretty girl, who was now trembling as he

clasped her in his arms under the sweet coolness of the leaves. He religiously remembered how she had dazzled him—like some ecstatic vision the recollection of which always remains imprinted on the mind's eye—the first time that he saw her in her father's mill, where he had gone to ask for work. She stood out all rosy from the warmth of the day, amid the impalpable clouds of flour, which diffused an indistinct whiteness through the air. With her hair hanging about her in untidy curls, as if she had just awakened from a profound sleep, she stretched herself lazily, her bare arms clasped behind her head, and yawned so as to show her white teeth, which glistened like those of a young wolf, and her fair bosom appeared beneath her unbuttoned bodice with innocent immodesty. He told her that he thought her adorable in such an awkward manner that she made fun of him and scourged him with her cruel laughter; and from that day he spent his life in Margot's shadow. He might have been taken for one of those wild beasts, ardent with desire, which ceaselessly utter maddened cries to the stars on nights when the constellations bathe the dark coverts in warm light. Margot met him wherever she went, and seized with pity, and by degrees agitated by his sobs, by his dumb entreaties, by the burning looks which flashed from his large eyes, she had returned his love; she had dreamed restlessly that during a whole night she had been in his vigorous arms which pressed her like corn that is being crushed in the mill, that she was obeying a man who had subdued her, and learning strange things which the other girls talked about in a low voice when they were drawing water at the well.

She had, however, been obliged to wait until

Midsummer Day, for the miller watched over his heiress very carefully.

The two lovers told each other all this as they were going along the dark road, and innocently giving utterance to words of happiness, which rise to the lips like the forgotten refrain of a song. At times they were silent, not knowing what more to say, and not daring to embrace each other any more. The night was soft and warm, the warmth of a half-closed alcove in a bedroom, which had the effect of a tumbler of new wine.

The leaves were sleeping, motionless and in supreme peace, and in the distance they could hear the monotonous sound of the brooks as they flowed over the stones. Amid the dull noise of insects, the nightingales were answering each other from tree to tree, and everything seemed alive with hidden life, and the sky was bright with such a shower of falling stars that they might have been taken for white forms wandering among the trees.

"Why have we come?" Margot asked, in a panting voice. "Do you want me any more, Tiennou?"

"Alas! I dare not," he replied. "Listen: you know that I was picked up on the high road, that I have nothing in the world except my two arms, and that Miller Fresquyl will never let his daughter marry a poor devil like me."

She interrupted him with a painful gesture, and putting her lips to his, she said:

"What does that matter? I love you, and I want you. Take me."

And it was thus, on St. John's night, Margot Fresquyl for the first time yielded to the mortal sin of love.

II

Did the miller guess his daughter's secret, when he heard her singing merrily from dawn till dusk, and saw her sitting dreaming at her window instead of sewing, as she was in the habit of doing?

Did he see it when she threw ardent kisses from the tips of her fingers to her lover at a distance?

However that might have been, he shut poor Margot in the mill as if it had been a prison. No more love or pleasure, no more meetings at night at the edge of the wood. When she chatted with the passers-by, when she tried furtively to open the gate of the inclosure and to make her escape, her father beat her as if she had been some disobedient animal, until she fell on her knees on the floor with clasped hands, scarcely able to move, and her whole body covered with purple bruises.

She pretended to obey him, but she revolted in her whole being, and the string of bitter insults which he heaped upon her rang in her head. With clinched hands and a gesture of terrible hatred, she cursed him for standing in the way of her love, and at night she rolled about on her bed, bit the sheets, moaned, stretched herself out for imaginary embraces, maddened by the sensual heat with which her body was still palpitating. She called out Tiennou's name aloud, she broke the peaceful stillness of the sleeping house with her heartrending sobs, and her melancholy voice drowned the monotonous sound of the water that was dripping under the arch of the mill, between the immovable paddles of the water wheel.

III

Then there came that terrible week in October when the unfortunate young fellows who had drawn bad numbers had to join their regiments. Tiennou was one of them, and Margot was in despair to think that she should not see him for five interminable years, that they could not even at that hour of sad farewells be alone and exchange those consoling words which later alleviate the pain of absence.

Tiennou prowled around the house like a starving beggar, and one morning, while the miller was mending the wheel, he managed to see Margot.

"I will wait for you in the old place to-night," he whispered in terrible grief. "I know it is the last time. . . . I shall throw myself into some deep hole in the river if you do not come! . . ."

"I will be there, Tiennou," she replied, in a bewildered manner. "I swear I will be there . . . even if I have to do something terrible to enable me to come!"

* * * * * * *

The village was burning in the dark night, and the flames, fanned by the wind, rose up like sinister torches. The thatched roofs, the ricks of corn, the haystacks, and the barns fell in and crackled like rockets, while the sky looked as if it were illuminated by an *aurora borealis*. Fresquyl's mill was smoking, and its burned ruins were reflected on the deep water. The sheep and cows were running about the fields in terror, dogs were howling, and women

were sitting on the broken furniture and were crying and wringing their hands; and during all this time Margot was abandoning herself to her lover's ardent caresses, and with her arms round his neck she said to him, tenderly:

"You see that I have kept my promise. . . . I set fire to the mill so that I might be able to get out. So much the worse if all have suffered. But I do not care as long as you are happy in having me, and love me!"

And, pointing to the fire, which was still burning fiercely in the distance, she added with a burst of savage laughter:

"Tiennou, we shall not have such beautiful tapers at our wedding mass when you come back from your regiment!"

And thus it was that for the second time Margot Fresquyl yielded to the mortal sin of love.

IN FLAGRANTE DELICTU

IT is certain," Sulpice de Laurière said, " that I had absolutely forgotten the date on which I was to allow myself to be taken in the very act, with a companion provided for the occasion. As neither my wife nor I had any serious or plausible reason for a divorce, not even the slightest incompatibility of temper, and as there is always a risk of not softening the heart of even the most indulgent judge when he is told that the parties have agreed to drag their load separately, each for himself, that they are too frisky, too fond of pleasure and of wandering about from place to place, to continue the conjugal experiment, we got up between us the ingenious stage arrangement of ' a serious wrong.'

" This was funnier than all the rest, and under any other circumstances it would have been repugnant to me to mix up our servants in the affair, as so many others do, or to distress that pretty little fair and delicate Parisian woman, even though it

were only in appearance, and to pass as a common Sganarelle, with the manners of a carter, in the eyes of some scoundrel of a footman or of some lady's maid. And so, when Maître Le Chevrier, that kind lawyer who certainly knows more female secrets than the most fashionable confessor, gave a startled exclamation on seeing me still in my dressing-gown, and slowly smoking a cigar, like an idler who has no engagements down on his tablets, and who is quietly waiting for the usual time for dressing and going to dine at his club, he exclaimed:

"'Have you forgotten that this is the day, at the Hôtel de Bade, between five and six o'clock? In an hour Madame de Laurière will be at the office of the Commissary of Police in the Rue de Provence, with her uncle and Maître Cantenac.'

"An hour! I only had an hour, sixty short minutes, to dress in, to take a room, find a woman, and persuade her to go with me immediately, and to excite her feelings, so that this extravagant adventure might not appear too equivocal to the Commissary of Police. One hour in which to carry out such a program was enough to make a man lose his head. And there were no possible means of putting off that obligatory entertainment, to let Madame de Laurière know, and to gain a few minutes more.

"'Have you found a woman, in any case?' Maître de Chevrier continued anxiously.

"'No, my dear sir!'

"I immediately began to think of the whole string of my dear female friends. Should I choose Liline Ablette, who could refuse me nothing; Blanche Rébus, who was the best comrade a man ever had, or Lalie Spring, that luxurious creature, who was constantly in search of something new?

Neither one nor the other of them, for it was ninety-nine chances to one that all these confounded girls were in the Bois or at their dressmakers'!

"'Bah! Just pick up the first girl you meet on the pavement.'

"And before the hour was up I was bolting the door of a room overlooking the boulevard.

"The woman whom I had picked up as she was walking past the cafés from the Vaudeville to Tortoni's was twenty at the most. She had an impudent, snub nose, as if it had been turned up in fun by a fillip, large eyes with deep rims round them; her lips were too red, and she had the slow, indolent walk of a girl who began too early in a vicious course, but she was pretty, and her linen was neat.

"She did not talk much, though she began by saying: 'Pay up at once, old man! You don't look like a fellow who would bilk a girl, but it puts me into better trim when I have been paid.'

"I gave her two napoleons, and she eyed me with gratitude and respect at the same time, but also with that uneasy look of a girl who asks herself: 'What does this fool expect for it?'

"The whole affair began to amuse me, and I must confess that I was rather taken with her, for she had a beautiful figure and complexion, and I was hoping that the Commissary would not come directly, when there was a loud rapping at the door.

"She sat up with a start, and grew so pale that one would have said she was about to faint.

"'What a set of pigs, to come and interrupt people like this!' she muttered between her teeth; while I affected the most complete calm.

"'Somebody who has made a mistake in the room, my dear,' I said.

"But the noise increased, and suddenly I heard a man's voice saying clearly and authoritatively:

"'Open the door, in the name of the law!'

"On hearing that, one might have supposed that she had received a shock from an electric battery, by the nimble manner in which she jumped out of bed; and, quickly putting on her stays and her dress anyhow, she endeavored to discover a way out in every corner of the room, like a wild beast trying to escape from its cage. I thought that she was going to throw herself out of the window, so I seized hold of her to prevent her.

"The unfortunate creature acted like a madwoman, and when she felt my arm round her waist she cried in a hoarse voice:

"'I see it. . . . You have sold me. . . . You thought that I should expose myself. . . . Oh! you filthy brutes—you filthy brutes!'

"And suddenly, passing from abuse to entreaties, pale, and with chattering teeth, she threw herself at my feet, and said, in a low voice:

"'Listen to me, my dear: you don't look a bad sort of fellow, and you would not like them to lock me up. I have a kid and the old woman to keep. Hide me behind the bed, do, and please don't give me up. . . . I will make it up to you, and you shall have no cause for grumbling. . . .'

"At that moment, however, the lock which they had unscrewed fell on the floor with a metallic sound, and Madame de Laurière and the Police Commissary, wearing his tricolored scarf, appeared in the doorway, while behind them the heads of the uncle and of the lawyer could be seen indistinctly in the background.

" The girl had uttered a cry of terror, and going up to the Commissary, she said, panting:

" ' I swear to you that I am not guilty, that I was not. . . . I will tell you everything if you will promise me not to tell them that I squealed, for they would pay me out. . . .'

" The Commissary, who was surprised, but who guessed that there was something which was not quite clear behind all this, forgot to draw up his report, and so the lawyer went up to him and said:

" ' Well, Monsieur, what are we waiting for? '

" But he paid no attention to anything but the woman, and, looking at her sharply and suspiciously through his spectacles, he said to her harshly:

" ' Your names and surnames? '

" ' Juliette Randal, or, as I am generally called, Jujutte Tête-de-pipe.'

" ' So you will swear that you were not——'

" She interrupted him eagerly:

" ' I swear it, Monsieur, and I know that my little man had nothing to do with it, either. He was only keeping a lookout while the others collared the swag. I will swear that I can account for every moment of my time that night. Roquin was drunk, and told me everything. They got five thousand francs from Daddy Zacharias, and, of course, Roquin had his share, but he did not work with his partners. It was Minon Ménilmuche, whom they call " Drink-without-Thirst," who held the gardener's hands, and who bled him with a blow from his knife.'

" The Commissary let her run on, and when she had finished, he questioned me, as if I had belonged to Jujutte's band.

" ' Your name and profession? '

"'Marquis Sulpice de Laurière, living on my own private income, at 24 Rue de Galilée.'

"'De Laurière? Oh, very well. . . . Excuse me, Monsieur, but at Madame de Laurière's request I declare formally before these gentlemen, who will be able to give evidence, that the girl Juliette Randal, whom they call 'Jujutte Tête-de-pipe,' is your mistress. You are at liberty to go, Monsieur le Marquis, and you, Randal girl, answer my questions.'

"Thus, by the most extraordinary chance, our divorce suit created a sensation which I had certainly never foreseen. I was obliged to appear in the Assize Court as a witness in the celebrated case of those burglars, when three of them were condemned to death, and to undergo the questioning of the idiotic presiding judge, who tried by all means in his power to make me acknowledge that I was Jujutte Tête-de-pipe's regular lover; and in consequence, ever since then I have passed as an ardent seeker after novel sensations, and a man who wallows in the lowest depths of the Parisian dunghill.

"I cannot say that this unjust reputation has brought me any pleasant love affairs. Women are so perverse, so absurd, and so curious!"

A VAGABOND

HE was a journeyman carpenter, a good workman, and a steady fellow, twenty-seven years old, but, although the eldest son, Jacques Randel had been forced to live on his family for two months, owing to the general lack of work. He had walked about seeking work for over a month and had left his native town, Ville-Avary, in La Manche, because he could find nothing to do and would no longer deprive his family of the bread they needed themselves, when he was the strongest of them all. His two sisters earned but little as char-women. He went and inquired at the town hall, and the mayor's secretary told him that he would find work at the Labor Agency, and so he started, well provided with papers and certificates, and carrying another pair of shoes, a pair of trousers, and a shirt, in a blue handkerchief at the end of his stick.

And he had walked almost without stopping, day and night, along interminable roads, in sun and rain, without ever reaching that mysterious country where workmen find work. At first he had the fixed idea that he must only work as a carpenter, but at every carpenter's shop where he applied he was told that they had just dismissed men on account of work being so slack, and, finding himself at the end of his resources, he made up his mind to undertake any job that he might come across on the road. And so by turns he was a navvy, stableman, stonecutter; he split wood, lopped the branches of trees, dug wells, mixed mortar, tied up fagots, tended goats on a mountain, and all for a few pence, for he only obtained two or three days' work occasionally by offering himself at a shamefully low price, in order to tempt the avarice of employers and peasants.

And now for a week he had found nothing, and had no money left, and nothing to eat but a piece of bread, thanks to the charity of some women from whom he had begged at house doors on the road. It was getting dark, and Jacques Randel, jaded, his legs failing him, his stomach empty, and with despair in his heart, was walking barefoot on the grass by the side of the road, for he was taking care of his last pair of shoes, as the other pair had already ceased to exist for a long time. It was a Saturday, toward the end of autumn. The heavy gray clouds were being driven rapidly through the sky by the gusts of wind which whistled among the trees, and one felt that it would rain soon. The country was deserted at that time of the evening, and on the eve of Sunday. Here and there in the fields there rose up stacks of thrashed-out corn,

like huge yellow mushrooms, and the fields looked bare, as they had already been sown for the next year.

Randel was hungry, with the hunger of some wild animal, such a hunger as drives wolves to attack men. Worn out and weakened with fatigue, he took longer strides, so as not to take so many steps, and with heavy head, the blood throbbing in his temples, with red eyes and dry mouth, he grasped his stick tightly in his hand, with a longing to strike the first passer-by who might be going home to supper.

He looked at the sides of the road, imagining he saw potatoes dug up and lying on the ground before his eyes; if he had found any he would have gathered some dead wood, made a fire in the ditch, and have had a capital supper off the warm, round vegetables, with which he would first of all have warmed his cold hands. But it was too late in the year, and he would have to gnaw a raw beetroot, as he had done the day before, which he might pick up in a field.

For the last two days he had spoken aloud as he quickened his steps under the influence of his thoughts. He had never thought much hitherto, as he had given all his mind, all his simple faculties, to his mechanical work. But now fatigue, and this desperate search for work which he could not get, refusals and rebuffs, nights spent in the open air lying on the grass, long fasting, the contempt which he knew people with a settled abode felt for a vagabond, and that question which he was continually asked: "Why do you not remain at home?" distress at not being able to use his strong arms which he felt so full of vigor, the recollection of the rela-

tions he had left at home and who also had not a penny, filled him by degrees with rage, which had been accumulating every day, every hour, every minute, and which now escaped his lips in spite of himself in short, growling sentences.

As he stumbled over the stones which tripped his bare feet, he grumbled: "How wretched! how miserable! . . . A set of hogs . . . to let a man die of hunger . . . a carpenter . . . a set of hogs . . . not two pennies . . . not two pennies . . . and now it is raining . . . a set of hogs! . . ."

He was indignant at the injustice of fate, and cast the blame on men, on all men, because nature, that great, blind mother is unjust, cruel, and perfidious, and he repeated through his clinched teeth: "A set of hogs," as he looked at the thin gray smoke which rose from the roofs, for it was the dinner hour. And without thinking that there is another injustice which is human, and which is called robbery and violence, he felt inclined to go into one of those houses to murder the inhabitants, and to sit down to table in their stead.

He said to himself: "I have a right to live, now . . . as they are letting me die of hunger . . . and yet I only ask for work . . . a set of hogs!" And the pain in his limbs, the gnawing in his heart rose to his head like terrible intoxication, and gave rise to this simple thought in his brain: "I have the right to live because I breathe and because the air is the common property of everybody, and so nobody has the right to leave me without bread!"

A fine, thick, icy cold rain was coming down, and he stopped and murmured: "How miserable!

Another month of walking before I get home." He was indeed returning toward home then; for he saw that he should more easily find work in his native town where he was known—and he did not mind what he did—than on the highroads, where everybody suspected him. As the carpentering business was not doing well, he would turn day laborer, be a mason's hodman, a ditcher, break stones on the road. If he only earned a franc a day, that would at any rate buy him something to eat.

He tied the remains of his last pocket-handkerchief round his neck to prevent the cold rain from running down his back and chest; but he soon found that it was penetrating the thin material of which his clothes were made, and he glanced about him with the agonized look of a man who does not know where to hide his body and to rest his head, and has no place of shelter in the whole world.

Night came on and wrapped the country in obscurity, and in the distance, in a meadow, he saw a dark spot on the grass; it was a cow, and so he got over the ditch by the roadside and went up to her without exactly knowing what he was doing. When he got close to her she raised her great head to him, and he thought: "If I only had a jug I could get a little milk." He looked at the cow and the cow looked at him, and then, suddenly giving her a violent kick in the side, he said: "Get up!"

The animal got up slowly, letting her heavy udders hang down; then the man lay down on his back between the animal's legs and drank for a long time, squeezing her warm, swollen teats, which tasted of the cowstall, with both hands, and he drank as long as she gave any milk. But the icy rain began to fall more heavily, and he saw no place of shelter on

the whole of that bare plain. He was cold, and he looked at a light which was shining among the trees in the window of a house.

The cow had lain down again heavily, and he sat down by her side and stroked her head, grateful for the nourishment she had given him. The animal's strong, thick breath, which came out of her nostrils like two jets of steam in the evening air, blew on the workman's face, and he said: "You are not cold inside there!" He put his hands upon her chest and under her stomach to find some warmth there, and then the idea struck him that he might pass the night beside that large, warm animal. So he found a comfortable place and laid his head on her side, and then, as he was worn out with fatigue, fell asleep immediately.

He woke up, however, several times, with his back or his stomach half frozen, according as he put one or the other against the animal's flank. Then he turned over to warm and dry that part of his body which had remained exposed to the night air, and soon went soundly to sleep again.

The crowing of a cock woke him; the day was breaking, it was no longer raining, and the sky was bright. The cow was resting with her muzzle on the ground, and he stooped down, resting on his hands, to kiss those wide, moist nostrils, and said: "Good-by, my beauty . . . until next time . . . you are a nice animal. . . . Good-by. . . ." Then he put on his shoes and went off, and for two hours walked straight on before him, always following the same road, and then he felt so tired that he sat down on the grass. It was broad daylight by that time, and the church bells were ringing; men in blue blouses, women in white caps, some on foot,

some in carts, began to pass along the road, going to the neighboring villages to spend Sunday with friends or relations.

A stout peasant came in sight, driving a score of frightened, bleating sheep in front of him with the help of an active dog, so Randel got up, and, raising his cap, said: "You do not happen to have any work for a man who is dying of hunger?" But the other, giving an angry look at the vagabond, replied: "I have no work for fellows whom I meet on the road."

And the carpenter went back and sat down by the side of the ditch again. He waited there for a long time, watching the country people pass and looking for a kind, compassionate face, before he renewed his request, and finally selected a man in an overcoat, whose stomach was adorned with a gold chain. "I have been looking for work," he said, "for the last two months and cannot find any, and I have not a penny in my pocket." But the would-be gentleman replied: "You should have read the notice which is stuck up at the beginning of the village: 'Begging is prohibited within the boundaries of this parish.' Let me tell you that I am the mayor, and if you do not get out of here pretty quickly I shall have you arrested."

Randel, who was getting angry, replied: "Have me arrested if you like; I should prefer it, for, at any rate, I should not die of hunger." And he went back and sat down by the side of his ditch again, and in about a quarter of an hour two gendarmes appeared on the road. They were walking slowly side by side, glittering in the sun with their shining hats, their yellow accoutrements, and their metal buttons, as if to frighten evildoers, and to put them

to flight at a distance. He knew that they were coming after him, but he did not move, for he was seized with a sudden desire to defy them, to be arrested by them, and to have his revenge later.

They came on without appearing to have seen him, walking heavily, with military step, and balancing themselves as if they were doing the goose-step; and then, suddenly, as they passed him, appearing to have noticed him, they stopped and looked at him angrily and threateningly, and the brigadier came up to him and asked: "What are you doing here?" "I am resting," the man replied calmly. "Where do you come from?" "If I had to tell you all the places I have been to it would take me more than an hour." "Where are you going to?" "To Ville-Avary." "Where is that?" "In La Manche." "Is that where you belong to?" "It is." "Why did you leave it?" "To look for work."

The brigadier turned to his gendarme, and said, in the angry voice of a man who is exasperated at last by an oft-repeated trick: "They all say that, these scamps. I know all about it." And then he continued: "Have you any papers?" "Yes, I have some." "Give them to me."

Randel took his papers out of his pocket, his certificates, those poor worn-out, dirty papers which were falling to pieces, and gave them to the soldier, who spelled them through, hemming and hawing, and then, having seen that they were all in order, he gave them back to Randel with the dissatisfied look of a man whom some one cleverer than himself has tricked.

After a few moments' further reflection, he asked him: "Have you any money on you?" "No."

"None whatever?" "None." "Not even a sou?" "Not even a sou!" "How do you live then?" "On what people give me." "Then you beg?" And Randel answered resolutely: "Yes, when I can."

Then the gendarme said: "I have caught you on the highroad in the act of vagabondage and begging, without any resources or trade, and so I command you to come with me." The carpenter got up and said: "Wherever you please." And, placing himself between the two soldiers, even before he had received the order to do so, he added: "Come, lock me up; that will at any rate put a roof over my head when it rains."

And they set off toward the village, whose red tiles could be seen through the leafless trees, a quarter of a league off. Service was just going to begin when they went through the village. The square was full of people, who immediately formed two lines to see the criminal pass. He was being followed by a crowd of excited children. Male and female peasants looked at the prisoner between the two gendarmes, with hatred in their eyes and a longing to throw stones at him, to tear his skin with their nails, to trample him under their feet. They asked each other whether he had committed murder or robbery. The butcher, who was an ex-spahi, declared that he was a deserter. The tobacconist thought that he recognized him as the man who had that very morning passed a bad half-franc piece off on him, and the ironmonger declared that he was the murderer of Widow Malet, whom the police had been looking for for six months.

In the hall of the municipal council, into which his custodians took him, Randel saw the mayor

again, sitting on the magisterial bench, with the schoolmaster by his side. "Ah! ah!" the magistrate exclaimed, "so here you are again, my fine fellow. I told you I should have you locked up. Well, brigadier, what is he charged with?"

"He is a vagabond without house or home, Monsieur le Maire, without any resources or money, so he says, who was arrested in the act of begging, but he is provided with good testimonials, and his papers are all in order."

"Show me his papers," the mayor said. He took them, read them, reread, returned them, and then said: "Search him;" so they searched him, but found nothing, and the mayor seemed perplexed, and asked the workman:

"What were you doing on the road this morning?" "I was looking for work." "Work? . . . On the highroad?" "How do you expect me to find any if I hid in the woods?"

They looked at each other with the hatred of two wild beasts which belong to different hostile species, and the magistrate continued: "I am going to have you set at liberty, but do not be brought up before me again." To which the carpenter replied: "I would rather you locked me up; I have had enough running about the country." But the magistrate replied severely: "Be silent." And then he said to the two gendarmes: "You will conduct this man two hundred yards from the village and let him continue his journey."

"At any rate, give me something to eat," the workman said; but the other grew indignant: "Have we nothing to do but to feed you? Ah! ah! ah! that is rather too much!" But Randel went on firmly: "If you let me nearly die of hunger

again, you will force me to commit a crime, and then, so much the worse for you other fat fellows."

The mayor had risen, and he repeated: "Take him away immediately, or I shall end by getting angry."

The two gendarmes thereupon seized the carpenter by the arms and dragged him out. He allowed them to do it without resistance, passed through the village again, and found himself on the highroad once more; and when the men had accompanied him two hundred yards beyond the village, the brigadier said: "Now off with you, and do not let me catch you about here again, for if I do, you will know it."

Randel went off without replying or knowing where he was going. He walked on for a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes, so stupefied that he no longer thought of anything. But suddenly, as he was passing a small house, where the window was half open, the smell of the soup and boiled meat stopped him suddenly, and hunger, fierce, devouring, maddening hunger, seized him, and almost drove him against the walls of the house like a wild beast.

He said aloud, in a grumbling voice: "In Heaven's name! they must give me some this time!" And he began to knock at the door vigorously with his stick, and as no one came he knocked louder and called out: "He! he! you people in there, open the door!" And then, as nothing moved, he went up to the window and pushed it wider open with his hand, and the close warm air of the kitchen, full of the smell of hot soup, meat, and cabbage, escaped into the cold outer air, and with a bound the carpenter was in the house. Two covers were laid on the table, and no doubt the

proprietors of the house, on going to church, had left their dinner on the fire, their nice Sunday boiled beef and vegetable soup, while there was a loaf of new bread on the chimneypiece, between two bottles which seemed full.

Randel seized the bread first of all and broke it with as much violence as if he were strangling a man, and then he began to eat it voraciously, swallowing great mouthfuls quickly. But almost immediately the smell of the meat attracted him to the fireplace, and, having taken off the lid of the saucepan, he plunged a fork into it and brought out a large piece of beef tied with a string. Then he took more cabbage, carrots, and onions until his plate was full, and, having put it on the table, he sat down before it, cut the meat into four pieces, and dined as if he had been at home. When he had eaten nearly all the meat, besides a quantity of vegetables, he felt thirsty and took one of the bottles off the mantelpiece.

Scarcely had he poured the liquor into his glass when he saw it was brandy. So much the better; it was warming and would instill some fire into his veins, and that would be all right, after being so cold; and he drank some. He found it very good, certainly, for he had grown unaccustomed to it, and he poured himself out another glassful, which he drank at two gulps. And then almost immediately he felt quite merry and light-hearted from the effect of the alcohol, just as if some great happiness filled his heart.

He continued to eat, but more slowly, and dipping his bread into the soup. His skin had become burning, and especially his forehead, where the veins were throbbing. But suddenly the church bells be-

gan to ring; mass was over, and instinct rather than fear, the instinct of prudence, which guides all beings and makes them clear-sighted in danger, made the carpenter get up. He put the remains of the loaf into one pocket and the brandy-bottle into the other, and he furtively went to the window and looked out into the road. It was still deserted, so he jumped out and set off walking again, but instead of following the highroad he ran across the fields toward a wood which he saw a little way off.

He felt alert, strong, light-hearted, glad of what he had done, and so nimble that he sprang over the inclosure of the fields at a single bound, and as soon as he was under the trees he took the bottle out of his pocket again and began to drink once more, swallowing it down as he walked, and then his ideas began to get confused, his eyes grew dim, and his legs as elastic as springs, and he started singing the old popular song:

Oh! what joy, what joy it is,
To pick the sweet, wild strawberries.

He was now walking on thick, damp, cool moss, and that soft carpet under his feet made him feel absurdly inclined to turn head over heels as he used to do when a child, so he took a run, turned a somersault, got up, and began over again. And between each time, he began to sing again:

Oh! what joy, what joy it is,
To pick the sweet, wild strawberries.

Suddenly he found himself above a deep road, and in the road he saw a tall girl, a servant, who

was returning to the village with two pails of milk. He watched, stooping down and with his eyes as bright as those of a dog who scents a quail, but she saw him, raised her head, and said: "Was that you singing like that?" He did not reply, however, but jumped down into the road, although it was a fall of at least six feet, and when she saw him suddenly standing in front of her, she exclaimed: "Oh! dear, how you frightened me!"

But he did not hear her, for he was drunk, he was mad, excited by another requirement which was more imperative than hunger, more feverish than alcohol; by the irresistible fury of the man who has been deprived of everything for two months, and who is drunk; who is young, ardent, and inflamed by all the appetites which nature has implanted in the vigorous flesh of men.

The girl started back from him, frightened at his face, his eyes, his half-open mouth, his outstretched hands, but he seized her by the shoulders, and without a word, threw her down in the road.

She let her two pails fall, and they rolled over noisily, and all the milk was spilled, and then she screamed lustily, but it was of no avail in that lonely spot.

When she got up the thought of her overturned pails suddenly filled her with fury, and, taking off one of her wooden sabots, she threw it at the man to break his head if he did not pay her for her milk.

But he, mistaking the reason of this sudden violent attack, somewhat sobered, and frightened at what he had done, ran off as fast as he could, while she threw stones at him, some of which hit him in the back.

He ran for a long time, very long, until he felt more tired than he had ever been before. His legs were so weak that they could scarcely carry him; all his ideas were confused, he lost the recollection of everything, and could no longer think about anything; and so he sat down at the foot of a tree, and in five minutes was fast asleep. He was soon awakened, however, by a rough shake, and, on opening his eyes, he saw two cocked hats of polished leather bending over him, and the two gendarmes of the morning, who were holding him and binding his arms.

"I knew I should catch you again," said the brigadier jeeringly. But Randel got up without replying. The two men shook him, quite ready to ill treat him if he made a movement, for he was their prey now; he had become a jailbird, caught by those hunters of criminals, who would not let him go again.

"Now, start!" the brigadier said, and they set off. It was late afternoon, and the autumn twilight was setting in over the land, and in half an hour they reached the village, where every door was open, for the people had heard what had happened. Peasants and peasant women and girls, excited with anger, as if every man had been robbed and every woman attacked, wished to see the wretch brought back, so that they might overwhelm him with abuse. They hooted him from the first house in the village until they reached the Hôtel de Ville, where the mayor was waiting for him to be himself avenged on this vagabond, and as soon as he saw him approaching he cried:

"Ah! my fine fellow! here we are!" And he rubbed his hands, more pleased than he usually was,

and continued: "I said so. I said so, the moment I saw him in the road."

And then with increased satisfaction:

"Oh! you blackguard! Oh! you dirty blackguard! You will get your twenty years, my fine fellow!"

THE LAST STEP

MONSIEUR DE SAINT-JUÉRY would not have deceived his old sweetheart for anything in the world: perhaps from an instinctive dread of the scandal that might ensue, and also from his desire for a calm, sheeplike existence, whose monotony was never disturbed by any shock, and perhaps from the remains of the love which had made him, during the first years of their acquaintance, the slave of the proud, dominating beauty and enthralling charm of the woman.

He kept out of the way of temptation almost timidly, and was faithful to her, and as submissive as a spaniel. He paid her every attention, did not appear to notice that the outlines of her figure, which had formerly been so harmonious and supple, were getting too full and puffy, that her face, which used to remind him of a blush rose, was getting wrinkled, and that her eyes were getting dull. He

admired her in spite of everything, almost blindly, and clothed her with imaginary charms, with an autumnal beauty, with the majestic and serene softness of an October twilight, and with the last blossoms which unfold by the side of the walks strewn with dead leaves.

But, although they had lived as man and wife for many years, though they were as closely bound to each other as if they had been legally married, and although Charlotte Guindal pestered him with entreaties and upset him with continual quarrels on the subject, and in spite of the fact that he believed her to be absolutely faithful to him and worthy of his most perfect confidence and love, yet Monsieur de Saint-Juéry had never been able to make up his mind to give her his name and to put their false position on a legal footing.

He really suffered from this, but remained firm and defended his position, quibbled, sought for subterfuges, replied by the eternal and vague: "What would be the good of it?" which nearly drove Charlotte mad, made her furious, and caused her to say angry and ill-tempered things. But he remained passive and listless, with his neck arched under the whip like a restive horse.

He asked her whether it was really necessary to their happiness, as they had no children? Did not everybody think that they were married? Was not she everywhere called Madame de Saint-Juéry, and had their servants any doubt that they were in the service of respectable married people? Was not his name, which had been transmitted from father to son, intact, honored, and often with a halo of glory round it, a sacred trust which no one had a right to touch? What would she gain if she bore

it legitimately? Did she for a moment suppose that she would rise higher in people's estimation and be more admitted into society, or that people would forget that she had been his good friend before becoming his wife? Did not everybody know that formerly, before he rescued her from that bohemian life in which she had been waiting for her chance in vain and was losing her good looks, Charlotte Guindal frequented all the public balls and showed her figure liberally at the Moulin-Rouge?

Charlotte knew his crabbed, though kindly and at the same time logical and obstinate, character too well to hope that she would ever be able to overcome his opposition and scruples, except by some clever woman's trick, some well-acted scene in a comedy; so she appeared to be satisfied with his reasons, and to renounce her bauble, and outwardly she showed an equable and conciliatory temper, and no longer worried Monsieur de Saint-Juéry with her recriminations; and thus the time went by, in calm monotony, without fruitless battles or fierce assaults.

Charlotte Guindal's medical man was Doctor Rabatel, one of those clever men who appear to know everything, but whom a country bone-setter would reduce to a "why?" by a few questions; one of those men who wish to impress everybody with their apparent value, and who make use of their medical knowledge as if it were some productive commercial house that carried on a questionable business; who can scent out those patients whom they can manage as if they were a piece of soft wax, who hold them in a continual state of terror, by keeping the idea of death constantly before their eyes.

They soon manage to obtain the mastery over such persons, keep tab of their consciences as well as the cleverest priest could do, make sure of being well paid as soon as they have obtained a footing anywhere, and extract their patients' secrets, in order to use them as a weapon for extorting money on occasion. He felt sure at once that this middle-aged lady wanted something of him. By some extraordinary perversion of taste he was rather fond of the remains of a good-looking woman, if they were well got up, and he became very much interested in her.

When winter came, however, a thorough change took place in Charlotte's health, that had hitherto been so good. She had no strength left, she felt ill after the slightest exertion, complained of internal pains, and spent whole days lying on the couch, with set eyes and without uttering a word, so that everybody thought that she was dying of one of those mysterious maladies which cannot be coped with, but which, by degrees, undermine the whole system. It was sad to see her rapidly sinking, lying motionless on her pillows, while a mist seemed to have come over her eyes, and her hands lay helpless on the bed, and her mouth seemed sealed by some invisible finger. Monsieur de Saint-Juéry was in despair; he cried like a child, and suffered as if somebody had plunged a knife into him, when the doctor said to him in his unctuous voice:

"I know that you are a brave man, my dear sir, and I may venture to tell you the whole truth. Madame de Saint-Juéry is doomed, irrevocably doomed. Nothing but a miracle can save her, and, alas! there are no miracles in these days. The end is only a question of a few hours."

Monsieur de Saint-Juéry had thrown himself into a chair, and was sobbing bitterly, covering his face with his hands.

"My poor dear, my poor darling!" he said, through his tears.

"Pray compose yourself and be brave," the doctor continued, sitting down by his side, "for I have to say something serious to you, and to convey to you our poor patient's last wishes. A few minutes ago she told me the secret of your double life, and of your connection with her. And now, in view of death, which she feels approaching so rapidly, for she is under no delusion, the unhappy woman wishes to die at peace with Heaven, with the consolation of having regulated her equivocal position and of having become your wife."

Monsieur de Saint-Juéry sat upright, with a bewildered look, while he moved his hands nervously; in his grief he was incapable of manifesting any will of his own, or of opposing this unexpected attack.

"Oh! anything that Charlotte wishes, doctor; anything, and I will myself go and tell her so, on my knees!"

The wedding took place discreetly, with something funereal about it, in the darkened room, where the words which were spoken had a strange sound, almost of anguish. Charlotte, who was lying in bed, with her eyes dilated through happiness, had put both trembling hands into those of Monsieur de Saint-Juéry, and she seemed to expire with the word "Yes" on her lips. The doctor looked at the moving scene, grave and impassive, with his chin buried in his white cravat and his two arms resting on the mantelpiece, while his eyes twinkled behind his glasses.

The next week, Madame de Saint-Juéry began to get better, and that wonderful recovery about which Monsieur Saint-Juéry tells, with effusive gratitude, everybody who will listen to him has so increased Doctor Rabatel's reputation that at the next election he will be made a member of the Academy of Medicine.

OUR HEART

PART I

CHAPTER I

A SIREN

NE day Massival, the celebrated composer of *Rebecca,* who had for fifteen years been called the "young and illustrious musician," said to his friend, André Mariolle:

"How is it that you have never been presented to Madame Michèle de Burne? I assure you that she is one of the most interesting women of the Paris of to-day."

"Because I do not consider myself at all the kind of person to fit in with her clique."

"My dear boy, you are greatly mistaken. Her salon is extremely original, stimulating, and artistic: one hears excellent music there, and the conversation would do credit

to the most renowned *potinières* of the last century. You would meet with great appreciation at Madame de Burne's: for one reason because you play the violin so admirably, for another because you have often been so highly spoken of among the habitués, and finally, because you bear the reputation of being the opposite of commonplace, and, moreover, are chary of your society."

Flattered, but still holding back, believing also that the young hostess in question was not entirely unaware of this overture, Mariolle exclaimed: "Pshaw! I do not feel at all inclined to go," but in such a manner that the indifference conveyed by the words was belied by an evident intention to consent. Massival went on:

"Let me take you there and present you to her one of these days. You already know her through hearing all of us talk of her, as we so frequently do. She is a remarkably bright and very pretty woman who, although only twenty-eight years of age, has forsworn matrimony, her first venture in that line having been so disastrous that she has resolved never to attempt another. Her salon is the rendezvous of agreeable men—not merely clubmen or society men—there are just enough of those to give it tone. I know she would be very glad to see you if I were to take you there."

Persuaded, Mariolle said: "All right then; one of these days."

A few days later the musician dropped in, saying:

"Are you engaged to dine anywhere to-morrow?"

"No, not exactly—but——"

"Then you must come to dinner at Madame de

Burne's. She has commissioned me to invite you, and I have, moreover, a note from her for you."

After a moment's hesitation for form's sake, Mariolle said:

"Very well, I'll go."

About twenty-seven years of age, a bachelor without profession, rich enough to take life as he pleased and to have traveled and accumulated a collection of modern paintings and antique trifles, André Mariolle bore the reputation of a man possessing a fine mind but a whimsical, capricious nature: one who posed as a recluse more from pride and reserve than from timidity. With fine natural gifts, quick of apprehension and perhaps of accomplishment, he had through indolence contented himself with the rôle of an onlooker, or, perhaps, to speak more accurately, of an amateur. Had he been born poor he would doubtless have made his mark, but the proverbial golden spoon having been his, he was haunted by eternal self-reproach at having achieved nothing. It is true he had made several half-hearted attempts: one in the direction of literature when he published a volume of sketches in which he showed himself the possessor of a polished and spirited style; another in music, in performing on the violin, in which accomplishment he had acquired sufficient skill to elicit, even from professionals, a recognition of his having won a high place among amateurs; and lastly, one in sculpture, that art in which a clever knack in portraying striking figures replaces knowledge and study in the eyes of the ignorant. A fine horseman, he was also, report said, an expert fencer, but he refrained from exhibiting his dexterity in public; perhaps withheld from doing so by the

same discretion that forbade his mingling in cliques where dangerous rivalry was to be encountered. Nevertheless, his friends extolled his abilities highly and sounded his praises with unanimity—it may be the more cordially because he never sought to eclipse them. All agreed that he was a trustworthy friend and a congenial companion. Personally, he was tall with a pointed beard; his hair was slightly grizzled but crisp and waving prettily, and he looked straight at you with a pair of bright, distrustful, and rather dark eyes. His most intimate friends were the novelist, Gaston de Lamarthe; the composer, Massival; the painters, Jobin, De Rivollet, and De Maudel, who, one and all, appeared to value his friendship, his wit, and even his judgment, while at the same time, with the vanity inseparable from men to whom success has undeniably come, they voted him in their hearts an amiable and decidedly intelligent failure.

His haughty reserve seemed to say: "I have achieved nothing, simply because I did not think it worth while to try"; he desired to enter only those houses in which his solid but concealed gifts would be acknowledged.

The reason why he allowed himself to be so easily persuaded to go to Madame de Burne's was because his best friends, those who industriously proclaimed his hidden talents, were the most intimate frequenters of her salon.

She lived in a pretty entresol, Rue du Général Foy, behind Saint Augustin. The dining-room and the general reception room looked on the street; two other rooms on a fine garden belonging to the proprietor of the house. One of these was the

salon, a very large, long room with three windows opening on trees whose leaves rustled against the panes. This room contained exceptionally beautiful, though chastely simple furniture; all its belongings spoke of exquisite taste and unlimited expenditure—the chairs and tables, the dainty cabinets and étagères, the paintings, the porcelain figurines under glass shades, the vases, statuettes, and the huge timepiece occupying the center of a panel. All the decoration of this room attracted and detained the eye. In order to create this interior, of which she was almost as proud as of her personality, Madame de Burne had put in requisition the friendship, the knowledge, the instinct for search of all the artists of her acquaintance. To please this woman, who was rich and paid lavishly, they had ransacked Paris for artistic furnishings and decorations, and the result was a salon renowned through the city and one which it was her joy to feel was more alluring than the conventional drawing-room of the ordinary woman of society. It was a favorite theory of hers that the easy comfort of luxurious seats, the perfect grace of outlines, the harmony of carefully blended shades of color held and captivated the incoming guest just as a pretty smile did. There are sympathetic and antipathetic interiors, she maintained; interiors, both rich and poor, that attract or repel the beings who enter them, make them gay or sad, stimulate or numb their faculties, warm or chill their hearts, and inspire them with an intense desire either to remain or to depart. In the center of this apartment, a grand piano held the place of honor, dominating all. Farther on, a high pair of folding doors led to a bedroom which again

opened into a dressing-room hung with Persian curtains. In this room Madame de Burne generally sat when alone.

Married to a well-bred scoundrel of polished manners, one of those domestic tyrants before whom all the women of their households are expected to bow and yield, she had for five years led a most wretched existence. For five years she had been forced to bear the exactions, the harshness, the jealousy, even the bodily violence of this despot. From the first day of their union, the coarse brutality of his animal nature, unsoftened by even ordinary consideration or delicacy, had unspeakably revolted the woman who had become his prey. One night on his way home he fell dead suddenly from the rupture of an aneurism. When she saw the form of her husband carried in, covered by a sheet, she gazed upon it, scarcely able to realize the full significance of this deliverance, filled with intense joy and at the same time experiencing a horrible dread of manifesting it. Of a gay and independent disposition, at times even exuberantly so, lively and magnetic with the spontaneous wit and brightness one sees so often in women born in Paris who seem to have absorbed into their being in infancy the pungent breath of the boulevards, laden with the applause or hisses issuing from the open doors of the playhouses, she, notwithstanding, retained from the five years of her captivity a singular timidity, a dread of saying too much or doing the wrong thing. Her husband, a polished man of the world, had trained her to receive his guests with mute correctness, an elegant, beautifully dressed slave. Among the tyrant's friends were many artists whom she had welcomed

with curiosity and listened to with delight, never daring to show how fully she comprehended and appreciated their genius. Her days of conventional mourning over, she invited a few of these to dinner one evening. Two sent excuses; three accepted and met to their astonishment a young hostess with a candid soul and alluring manner who put them at their ease at once, declaring with frank grace how great had been her pleasure in meeting them in days gone by. Little by little she gleaned among the old-time acquaintances who had ignored and misunderstood her, and ended by receiving, as an emancipated woman but one untouched by the faintest breath of slander, a few women and a number of men chosen from among the most brilliant lights of Paris. The first-chosen became the intimate habitués; they brought others, and Madame de Burne's salon grew to be a sort of little court where every guest possessed some claim to distinction—fame, genius, or an ancient name—several old titles being always heard among the names announced at her gatherings.

Her father, M. de Pradon, who occupied the apartment immediately above hers, served her as chaperon. A beau of an earlier generation, elegant and courtly, he was all attention to the daughter whom he treated habitually as a *grande dame*, presiding at her Thursday dinners. These functions were celebrated throughout Paris and invitations thereto eagerly sought. The claims of all would-be guests were carefully discussed, and, as often as not, dismissed after consultation held among the inner circle. Witty sayings that had circulated at these dinners leaked out and were quoted in the city. Débuts of actors, artists, and

young poets took place under Madame de Burne's roof; long-haired devotees of music, introduced by Gaston de Lamarthe, superseded the Hungarian violinists first brought by Massival, and exotic dancing girls exhibited their fantastic gyrations in her salon before appearing at l'Eden or the Folies-Bergère.

Madame de Burne, besides being jealously guarded by her friends, had an unpleasant recollection of the world at large from the experience gained during her married life, and in consequence did not feel disposed to enlarge her circle of acquaintance to any very extended degree. Satisfied with her environment and fearing the tongue of scandal, she gave way with watchful prudence to a certain innate tendency to bohemianism that was part of her nature. Anxious to preserve a spotless name, she curbed her penchant toward rashness, indulged only her most harmless whims, and was careful not to give the slightest handle to those who would fain have suspected her of flirtation or intrigue. Many had besieged her heart; but no one so far, rumor said, had been rewarded with success. Men whispered this one to the other and with surprise, for few of the stronger sex have much faith in the virtue of an "unattached woman." Some said that the hateful recollection of her relations with her husband had cured her forever of any idea of listening to the voice of love. This was the preponderating opinion among the intimates, but the worldly wise Georges de Maltry laughed softly and announced: "Her time will come. It must come to a woman of that temperament, and the later it comes the more serious the affair will be. With her artistic bent, the probabil-

ity is, the man who awakens her heart will be a singer or a pianist."

Gaston de Lamarthe thought otherwise. In his character of novelist, observer, and psychologist, making a specialty of studying people of the fashionable world, of whom he executed portraits both ironical and true to life, he professed above all to understand and analyze women with unique and infallible penetration. He classed Madame de Burne with the eccentric beings depicted in his absorbing romance *One of Them.* He was the first to portray that new type of woman, swayed by semi-hysterical nerves, torn by a thousand contradictory whims that did not rise to the dignity of wishes, losing all illusions, yet having tasted no real joys, thanks to the trend of modern conditions and to the accident of circumstances, who without ardor in any direction, without enthusiasms, seem to combine the caprices of children with the exhausted vitality of old cynics.

He, among others, had been an unsuccessful aspirant. All the faithful intimates had become, one after another *épris* of Madame de Burne; the attack over, they had remained under her sway, though in different degrees. As time went on they seemed to form themselves into a little coterie of worshipers. She was their madonna, of whom they among themselves constantly thought and spoke, unable, even when absent from her, to throw off her power. They praised her, boasted of her, criticised her or depreciated her according to the way they felt she was treating them at the moment. Sensitively jealous of her and to some extent spying upon one another, they were careful to exclude from her new acquaintance any man who might

prove a dangerous rival. There were seven of these devoted followers: Massival, Gaston de Lamarthe, the portly Fresnel, and that combination of philosopher and ultra-fashionable young society man, M. Georges de Maltry, renowned for his paradoxes, his elaborate, eloquent, up-to-date erudition, incomprehensible to even his most ardent admirers, and even more celebrated for his taste in dress, as *recherché* as his theories; besides these chosen spirits, a few men of title, said to be also men of some degree of wit, the Comte de Marantin, the Baron de Gravil, and two or three others also offered incense at the shrine.

The two privileged members of this band of the élite appeared to be Massival and Lamarthe, who seemed to possess the knack of being always able to amuse the young woman by their bohemian free and easiness, their chatter, their skill in taking everybody off—even their liege lady herself, when she would permit it. But the care which she took never to manifest to any one of her admirers a prolonged or marked predilection, her bright, coquettish manner toward each, and the perfectly impartial distribution of her favors among the members of the band, maintained among them a friendship spiced with hostility and an ardor of spirit that made the situation a most amusing one to watch.

Now and again, one of them, to play a trick on the rest, would introduce a newcomer. But as this newcomer was never a very striking or interesting figure, the others were seldom perturbed by the incident. This was the way in which André Mariolle had been brought to visit Madame de Burne.

A footman garbed in black announced the names:

" Monsieur Massival.

" Monsieur Mariolle."

Under the light of a lamp formed of a high column of gilded bronze dominated by a huge shade of crushed old rose silk, a woman's and three men's heads were bending over an album which Lamarthe had just brought in. The novelist was turning the pages and explaining the pictures.

One of the heads turned, and Mariolle, coming forward, saw a bright, blond face with fluffy curls at the temples that seemed to glow like brushwood on fire. The delicate *retroussé* nose gave animation to the face, the clearly cut mouth, the dimpled cheeks, the slightly prominent chin gave an expression almost of mockery, but the eyes, light-blue, with great, dilated pupils, were tinged with melancholy. This singular and brilliant look of the eyes suggested dreams produced by morphine, or, perhaps, merely a coquettish application of belladonna.

Madame de Burne rose, and, holding out a hand, welcomed the newcomer: " I have been a long time begging our friends to bring you to see me," she said. " But I always have to ask for such things to be done several times before they happen."

She was tall, graceful, leisurely in her movements, slightly *décolletée,* showing scarcely the tips of her superb shoulders glowing pinky in the light of the lamp. Her hair was not red, but that indescribable color certain leaves take on when burned by the sun in autumn. She presented Mariolle to her father, who bowed and offered his hand. The men chatted familiarly among themselves in three groups, seeming perfectly at home, just as if they were in a sort of club but where the presence of a woman compelled a certain gentleness of manner.

The portly Fresnel was talking with the Comte de Marantin. The assiduous visits of Fresnel to this house and the evident affection he felt for Madame de Burne often irritated and angered his friends. Still young, but fat as an alderman, puffy, almost clean shaven, his head covered by a thin coating of downy, light hair, he was common and tedious, and it was patent to all that he had assuredly but one feature to invest him with interest in the eyes of the young woman—one that would render him still more unattractive to other eyes—the fact that he loved her with infatuation, loved her with a blind, senseless intensity. He had been nicknamed "the seal." He was a married man, but he had never introduced his wife to Madame Burne. Rumor said that she was very jealous of the young widow. Lamarthe and Massival, particularly, were indignant at the cordiality she manifested toward their puffy rival, and, when they could not refrain from expressing their reprobation, she would say, smiling:

"I love him just as I should a good, faithful spaniel."

Georges de Maltry and Gaston de Lamarthe were talking over the latest, as yet uncertain, discovery in regard to micro-biology. M. de Maltry advanced his theory on the subject with subtlety and depth of knowledge, and the novelist accepted it with the eagerness with which men of letters generally welcome anything original and novel. The expositor of the beau-monde was fair, the flaxen type of fairness, slight and tall. He wore a coat fitting him tightly over the hips, and his clever-looking head, with its smooth, pale hair, so smooth that it looked as if it had been pasted on, rose

above his white collar and tie. As to Lamarthe, Gaston de Lamarthe (the " de " had inoculated him with a few pretensions in the direction of aristocracy and " high-life "), he was nothing if not a man of letters, a pitiless and terrible man of letters. Gifted with an eye that took in faces, attitudes, gestures with the precision of a camera, and endowed with a penetration and sense of romance as thoroughly a part of his make-up as the scent is that of a hunting dog, he harvested from morning till night material for his work. With a wonderful grasp of the visible, and an instinctive intuition revealing to him that which was hidden from others, he created books that seemed like pieces of human existence, so vivid was their tone, their movement. The appearance of each of his novels convulsed society with agitation, conjectures, mirth, and vexation, for people guessed at the thinly masked characters; and his passage through a salon invariably left a crowd of perturbed persons in its wake. He had published a volume of reminiscences in which many men and women of his acquaintance had been portrayed, not exactly spitefully, but with an accuracy and incisiveness that excruciated the originals. Some one had nicknamed him " Save me from my friends." With an inscrutable nature and a reticent tongue, he was said to have been at one time deeply in love with a woman who had flouted his love; on her account he had avenged himself on all other women.

Massival and he were thoroughly congenial, although the nature of the musician was a very different one—franker, more expansive, less susceptible to pain, perhaps, but more apparently sensitive. After producing two great successes, a piece

played in Brussels, then presented in Paris, where it had been received with acclamation at the Opéra-Comique, and a second work accepted at once at the Grand Opéra, and welcomed as the announcement of a new star rising in the musical world, he had then experienced that sort of check that seems to occur to so many artists of to-day, seeming almost like a kind of premature paralysis. They do not grow old, mantled in glory and success, like their fathers, but seem stricken with loss of power in the flower of their age. Lamarthe used to say: "Nowadays, we in France have nothing but great men who have become fiascos!" Massival, about this time, seemed greatly *épris* of Madame de Burne, and the "intimates" were gossiping about it: therefore, every eye was turned on him when he kissed her hand with a look of adoration. He asked:

"Are we late?" She replied:

"No. I am still expecting the Baron de Gravil and the Marquise de Bratiane."

"The Marquise! What luck! Then we shall have some music to-night?"

"I hope so."

The tardy pair entered. The Marquise, who, on account of a tendency to embonpoint, appeared short, was of Italian birth, lively, with black eyes, eyelashes, and eyebrows, and black hair that was so stiff and thick that it almost trespassed on her forehead and even threatened her eyes. She was said to possess one of the most remarkable voices to be heard among women of society. The Baron, a man of perfect correctness of demeanor, with a narrow chest and huge head, was an incomplete entity without his violoncello in his hands. A pas-

sionate melomaniac, he was never seen except at houses where music was a chief element in the entertainment.

Dinner was announced; Madame de Burne, taking the arm of André de Mariolle, allowed her guests to precede them. When all had left the salon and they were alone, at the moment when they were about to follow, she shot at him an oblique, lightning flash out of her pale, large-pupiled eyes—a look in which he discovered a more vivid interest than is usually manifested in the expression of pretty young hostesses who are receiving a young man on the occasion of his first visit.

The dinner was dull and monotonous. Lamarthe, nervous and preoccupied, seemed hostile to everybody; not openly hostile, for he plumed himself upon his good breeding, but inspired by that almost imperceptible ill-humor that at once lowers the social thermometer at any gathering. Massival, absent-minded also, ate little and looked askance from time to time at the mistress of the house, who, inattentive, smiled in answer often to remarks, then became instantly serious, her mind seemingly dwelling on matters that interested her far more than her friends did. Notwithstanding, she did her duty amply as a hostess toward the Marquise and Mariolle: but she did it mechanically and from a sense of propriety, her mind evidently far from herself and her surroundings. Fresnel and M. de Maltry were at odds over contemporary poetry. Fresnel possessed on the subject of poetry the superficial ideas of the ordinary man of the world, while M. de Maltry had a very different point of view.

Several times during dinner, Mariolle again encountered that singular glance from his hostess, but

each time less intense, less inquisitive. Among the guests, only the Marquise de Bratiane, the Comte de Marantin, and the Baron de Gravil seemed to be in their usual vein: these three chattered unceasingly, discussing a variety of topics.

The dinner over, Massival, more and more depressed, sat down at the piano and sounded a few notes. Madame de Burne at once awoke from her revery, and she organized a little concert composed of the pieces she enjoyed the most. The Marquise was in good voice, and, stimulated by the presence of Massival, sang like a true artist. The composer accompanied her with the melancholy face that he always saw fit to wear when playing. His hair, which he wore long, came over his coat collar and touched his silky beard. Many women had loved him, and he was still pursued by the homage of some, it was hinted. Madame de Burne, seated near the piano, listening with all her soul, appeared at the same time to be looking at him and not to see him. Mariolle felt a little jealous: he was not jealous in regard particularly to Massival and his hostess, but beholding this rapt expression of a pretty woman fixed upon an illustrious man, he felt his vanity humiliated. This was by no means the first time he had suffered through contact with successful men at the hands of women whose favor was for many the supreme recompense.

About ten o'clock three other guests came, the Baronne de Frémines and two wealthy Jewesses. Conversation ran on an engagement just announced and a divorce that seemed imminent.

Mariolle surveyed Madame de Burne sitting under a lamp held aloft by a column. Her nose, slightly tip-tilted, the dimples in her cheeks, and

the dainty cleft in her chin gave her face a charming, infantile gayety, although she was approaching her thirtieth year, and although the flower-like bloom of her youth had passed and a sort of haunting look of mystery had taken its place. Under the flooding radiance of the great lamp her skin took on the peculiar shading of pale velvet and her hair glistened with tawny lights whenever she moved her head. She felt Mariolle's gaze, fixed upon her as it was from the other end of the salon, and, rising after a moment or two, she glided toward him, smiling as if in answer to a summons.

"I'm sure you are feeling bored, Monsieur," she said. "One always feels so in a house where one is not acclimatized."

He protested the reverse, of course. She took a chair next to him and immediately they began to talk. There was no hesitation, no check. It was like a match held to very dry wood; at once the flame answered. It was as if they had always known each other's opinions and sensations, as if the same nature, the same tendencies and tastes had predisposed them to understand each other and that destiny had ordained that they should meet. Perhaps some adroitness on the young woman's part contributed to bring about this state of feeling; but the delight of finding some one who listened, who grasped his meaning at once, who furnished him opportunities for repartee by her replies, inspired Mariolle. Flattered also by the manner in which he had been treated by her, captivated by the alluring grace and charm with which she knew so well how to fascinate men, he revealed that subtle wit and delicate quality of mind peculiar to him, which attracted sympathy in a powerful degree.

All at once she exclaimed:

"It is really very enjoyable to converse with you, Monsieur. I had been told that it was, indeed."

He felt himself blushing, and said boldly:

"While I had heard, Madame, that you were ——"

"A coquette," she broke in. "Well, so I am with people who please me. Everybody knows it, and I do not deny the fact; but you will find out that my coquetry is thoroughly impartial: in this manner I succeed in keeping my friends always about me."

She said this with a look that signified "Do not be a simpleton; keep your head: do not make the mistake of thinking you will be accorded more than others have won from me."

"You are warning me of the dangers that will beset my path here," he answered. "Thank you, Madame. I like that."

She had opened to him an opportunity of speaking to her personally, and he availed himself of it. He proceeded to pay her compliments and discovered that she enjoyed this; then he piqued her curiosity by telling her what he had heard said of her mode of life and tastes in the different sets he frequented. Although she affected a profound indifference, she could not conceal her desire to listen. He flatteringly depicted a woman of independent spirit, bright and intellectual, who had surrounded herself with men of eminence and who yet remained an accomplished and fascinating woman of society. She protested with smiles, with faint denials, highly amused by all the details he furnished, and, with an appearance of indulging in badinage, she led him

on to say more and more, questioning him wittily with an eager desire for flattery.

" She is, after all, just like all the rest," he mused, looking at her; " nothing but a mere child," and then he uttered a pretty compliment vaunting her genuine love of art, so rarely found in a woman. An unexpected shade of mockery, of that French raillery that is the essence of our race, instantly was visible in her face. Mariolle had overdone it. She showed him that she was not duped.

" Dear me," she remarked, " I really must confess that I do not feel perfectly sure whether it is art or artists that I am fond of."

" How can one love the artists without loving art? " retorted Mariolle.

" Because they are sometimes more amusing than men of society."

" Yes, but they have more inconvenient foibles."

" That's true."

" Then you do not care for music? "

She grew serious at once.

" Oh, but I do. I adore music. I think I love it better than anything else, although Massival maintains that I do not understand it."

" He said so? "

" No, but he thinks so."

" How do you know? "

" Oh, we women guess intuitively almost all that we do not know for a certainty."

" So Massival thinks you cannot grasp music? "

" I am sure of it. I gather it by the manner alone with which he interprets it to me and underlines the modulation with an air of thinking: ' This is a useless piece of work, but I'll do it for you because you are a nice woman.' "

"Nevertheless, he told me that better music is heard at your house than anywhere else in Paris."

"That is true, thanks to him."

"Don't you care for literature?"

"Of course I do, and I even have the presumption to imagine that I can appreciate good literature, in spite of Lamarthe's dictum."

"Does he also think you cannot appreciate that?"

"Of course he does."

"You don't mean to say that he told you so?"

"He certainly did. His theory is that, although there are to be found now and again women who have a delicate and true perception of expressed sentiments, the sex is, as a whole, incapable of discerning that which is superior in his calling."

Mariolle smiled and asked: "What is your opinion on the matter, Madame?"

She reflected some moments, then, looking him squarely in the face to see if he were listening carefully and grasping what she answered:

"I have my own ideas on the subject," she said. "I believe that women's capacity for feeling—feeling, I say—makes their minds able to apprehend everything: only their minds do not always retain the matter grasped. Do you understand me?"

"No, not at all, Madame."

"I mean by that, that in order for us to grasp anything as fully as men do, our womanly nature must be appealed to, rather than our intelligence. We cannot feel interested in any subject presented to us by a man, unless he first gains our sympathy, for we see everything through a haze of sentiment. By sentiment I do not mean love—no—through a

haze of sentiment: and sentiment takes on all sorts of forms, manifestations, and shades. It is something belonging specially to us. You men cannot understand it in the very least: it befogs you, while it illuminates us. Oh! I know that this is all very vague to you: so much the worse! To sum it up, if a man loves us and we care for him—this is indispensable—and if this man is a superior being he can, if he takes the trouble, make us feel, see, apprehend everything—everything; and we can, at times and in fragments, share his intellect. But this is only evanescent, for we forget—yes, we forget, just as the air forgets the words it has carried. We are intuitive and illuminable, but variable, impressionable, influenced by that which is about us. If you only knew how I recognize in my own self conditions of the mind that make of me several different women, according to the weather, my state of health, what I have been reading, what people have been saying to me! There are days when I possess the soul of a blameless mother of a family—without children, and others in which I possess one that is almost that of a cocotte—without lovers."

Charmed, he asked:

"Do you believe that most intelligent women are capable of this mental activity?"

"Yes," she replied, "only it is latent, almost always; and, besides, the existence custom has ordained for them forces them in different directions and determines matters for them."

"You prefer music to all other arts, you say?"

"Yes. But what I have been telling you is so true! Never could I have enjoyed it as I have, never should I have adored it as I have, had it not been for that marvelous Massival. All those won-

derful works that I had heretofore passionately loved I still loved, but he put a soul into them for me when he showed me how to interpret them. What a pity it is that he is married!"

These words were uttered in so lively a tone, but at the same time with such profound regret, that they completely corroborated her theories in regard to women and their admiration for art.

Massival was in fact a married man. He had contracted a union before his days of success, but he never spoke of his wife and she never accompanied him anywhere, and, although he had three children, the fact was known to but few. Mariolle began to laugh. She was undeniably attractive, this woman, piquante, different from the conventional type and very pretty. He persisted in gazing with a pertinacity which did not appear to annoy her at that face both grave and gay, a little defiant, with its audacious nose, its sensuous bloom, flushed by the glorious summer of a maturity so fine, so tender, so delicious, that it appeared at the year, the month, the very minute of its perfection. He asked himself: "Is she painted, I wonder?" and he searched for the little tell-tale line at the roots of the hair, but without discovering it. Heavy steps behind him on the carpet startled him and he turned his head. Two footmen were carrying in the tea-table. The little blue-flamed lamp made the water murmur softly in a great silver apparatus, shining and complicated as a chemical instrument.

"You will take a cup of tea?" she asked.

He said he would. She rose and went with an upright, almost stiff, unswinging gait toward the table where the singing vapor ascended in the midst of an array of cakes, preserved fruits, and bonbons.

Her silhouette clearly defined against the tapestry of the salon, Mariolle observed the slenderness of her waist and the slimness of her hips, also the beauty of the shoulders and full throat that had struck him earlier.

As he watched her trailing her skirt along the carpet he said to himself: "A siren! Everything about her is alluring!" She now went from one to the other, offering refreshments with dainty grace. Mariolle was following her with his eyes, and Lamarthe, who was walking up and down with his cup and saucer in his hands, came to him and said:

"Shall we leave together?"

"Certainly."

"Let us go at once, if it is the same to you. I am tired."

They left. When they had reached the street the novelist said:

"Are you going home or to the club?"

"I am going to the club for an hour or two."

"To the 'Tambourines'?"

"Yes."

"I'll go to the door with you, but I won't go in. I always feel bored in places of that sort."

When they had gone several steps, Mariolle said:

"What a peculiar woman! What do you think of her?"

Lamarthe laughed out.

"Aha! it is beginning!" he said. "You are catching it like all the rest of us; as to me, I am cured, but I have had the disease. The symptoms, my friend, consist in talking of her, nothing but her, when the patients are together, whenever and wherever they meet."

"It strikes me that there is nothing surprising

in my speaking of her, seeing that this is the first time we have met."

"All right. Let us talk of her. You are going to fall in love with her. It is inevitable; every one goes through it." "She is so very bewitching?"

"Yes, and no. Those who admire the women of yesterday, soulful women, women with heart and sensibility, the women one reads of in old novels, loathe her and get to detest her so much that they end by saying terrible things about her. Others, such as ourselves, to whom the modern woman appeals, are forced to confess that she is exquisite, although we do not become attached to her. This is exactly what always happens. Men do not die of love for her: they do not even suffer excessively, but they feel furious that she is not different. You will be stricken if she vouchsafes to cast the spell: indeed, I see that the charm is already beginning to work."

"Oh, I am simply the latest comer: besides, I fancy she is fond of titles."

"Yes, she certainly is not indifferent to them, and yet at the same time she laughs at them. The most famous, *recherché,* even the most distinguished man will not return very often to her house, if he has not found favor in her sight: and yet, she is fond of that idiot of a Fresnel and that slimy De Maltry. She becomes greatly attached to cretins without the slightest reason for doing so; it is impossible to guess why, unless it be because they amuse her more than we do—or, perhaps, because that, at heart, they love her better than we do, and all women are more swayed by that consideration than by any other."

Lamarthe went on talking about her, analyzing

her character, arguing with himself, repeating at times to contradict what he had said, interrogated by Mariolle, who listened and answered with deep interest, fascinated by the subject, a little misled, perhaps, his mind full of accurate observations and false deductions.

He said: "She is not the only one; there are fifty like her, if not more, nowadays. For instance, that little Frémines woman, whom we saw enter her house a minute ago, is another of the same kind, only bolder and married to a foreigner: her house is one of the most amusing places to visit in Paris. I drop in there quite often."

Without perceiving how far they were wandering, they had followed the Boulevard Malesherbes, the Rue Royale, the Avenue of the Champs Elysées, and were arriving at the Arc de Triomphe. Lamarthe suddenly drew out his watch:

"My dear boy," said he, "we have now been an hour and ten minutes talking about her: quite enough for to-day. I'll walk with you as far as your club another time. Go home and go to bed, and I'll do the same."

CHAPTER II

THE COMPACT

MADAME DE BURNE'S dressing-room was a large, well-lighted apartment hung with beautiful Persian draperies imported for her by a friend, a diplomat. Their background was yellow, a yellow like gilded cream, and the design, which was in all colors, yellow predominating, consisted of bizarre-looking houses with turned-up roofs between which huge-maned lions and long-horned antelopes roamed, interspersed by gorgeous birds of paradise on the wing.

There was little furniture. Three long tables covered with plaques of green marble bore all the requisites for the toilet of a woman. On the central one were the great washbasins of heavy crystal; on the second an army of bottles, boxes, and vases of all shapes, surmounted by silver tops on which were displayed a monogram and crown. On the third table were spread all the complicated and delicate instruments that modern luxury has devised

for the care of the person. Besides these tables the only other pieces of furniture were two large easy-chairs luxuriously upholstered, inviting in appearance to the possessor of tired limbs. Along an entire wall was an immense mirror formed of three panels with hinges, permitting the young woman to see herself from all points of view. To the right, in a niche usually hidden by a drapery, was a bath, a deep, green marble basin into which one descended by means of two steps. An exquisite Cupid, designed by the sculptor, Prédolé, sitting on the edge,

poured in hot or cold water, from the two shells with which he was playing. At the end of this retreat a Venetian mirror, made in the form of a vault, covered and reflected the bath and the bather. A little farther on stood a desk covered with papers—letters folded up, scraps of torn envelopes

with gilded monograms. This was where Madame de Burne did her writing, for she lived much in this room when alone.

Day-dreaming after her bath, lying back in an easy-chair, her heavy, bronze-brown hair twisted up on the top of her head, her firm, supple arms shining in the loose sleeves of her dressing-gown, she was disturbed by a soft knock at the door. Her maid entered, bearing a letter. Madame de Burne opened it, and, having read the first few lines, dismissed the servant, saying: "I shall ring for you in an hour."

When she was alone she smiled with victorious joy. The opening words had sufficed to show her that this letter was the capitulation of Mariolle. He had resisted much longer than she had deemed possible. During the last three months she had lured him on with all the grace, the winning charm that she was capable of. Never before had she made such efforts to captivate. He seemed distrustful, on his guard against the wiles of her insatiable coquetry. There had been many *tête-à-tête* conversations, during which she had put forth all her physical allurements, all her seductive wit, and many musical soirées to which they had listened together, vibrating with the same emotion, before she had been able to detect in his eye the avowal of surrender, the supplication of a soul that is vanquished. How well she knew that look! How often had she, with feline skill and unquenchable curiosity, awakened that torturing fire in the eyes of men! It amused her so to see them give in, little by little, conquered, dominated by her power, to find herself becoming the one woman on earth in their eyes, their capricious and tyrannous idol! This feeling had risen in her

gradually, like an instinct developing itself, a natural instinct for war and conquest. It may have been that a germ of longing for reprisals had been planted in her heart during the years of her matrimonial bondage, a sort of vague desire to avenge herself for what she was undergoing at the hands of one man, by making all others that came within her reach suffer also. She was, above all, a coquette, and as soon as she had gained her freedom she set to work to hunt for and subdue those susceptible to her charms, just as a hunter goes out in search of game, for the mere pleasure of seeing it fall. Her heart was not eager for emotion, as are the hearts of tender, sentimental women: she did not crave the exclusive love of one man, nor did she seek happiness in reciprocal passion.

All she wanted from those about her was admiration, homage, worship, and incense. Whoever became one of the habitués of her salon had to become also the slave of her sorceries; and no one could inspire her for any length of time with interest if he refused to be conquered by her coquetries, disdainful of love, or perhaps worshiping elsewhere. In order to keep her friendship, it was necessary to be her captive; and in that case she lavished countless kindnesses and attentions so as to retain her prisoner. Once enrolled among her troop of adorers, a man seemed to belong to her by right of conquest. She governed her captives with wonderful skill, guided by her knowledge of their defects and virtues and by the turn their jealousy took. Too importunate admirers were punished by expulsion from the band; and when, grown wiser, they demanded readmission, she would generally grant the boon, imposing, however, severe conditions. She

took so much pleasure in this game of pitch and toss with men's hearts that she found it as interesting to bewitch old men as to turn the heads of young ones. It almost seemed as if her own degree of affection were regulated by the intensity of that which she inspired, the dull and heavy Fresnel retaining his place as a prime favorite, thanks to the frenzied passion he felt for her. She was not, however, entirely indifferent to the influence of men: she had been conscious of the beginning of impulses known only to herself that she had checked just at the moment when they might have become dangerous. Artists, particularly, whose refinements of thought and subtleties of feeling she was able to comprehend, had several times agitated the surface of her heart, but, a prey to prudent fears, undecided, and watchful, she had always drawn back in time. In addition to her natural caution, she saw her satellites through the eyes of the modern woman, who in a very short time denudes the greatest man of his prestige. As soon as, *épris* of her, they threw themselves on her mercy, they became divested of the glamor that had given them any charm in her sight, and she saw them henceforth, like all the others who had preceded them, in the guise of poor wretches who had been subjugated by her arts.

In spite of all this, she was a victim to boredom. She did not really enjoy society and only went into it through precedent. She underwent the long evenings with suppressed yawns and sleepy eyelids, amused only by the mannerisms, the affectations, of those she had once admired and appreciated, by her own caprices and the gratification of her restless curiosity. Never able to find relief in a real affection, she lived in a sort of gay ennui, always

on the search for distraction and already weighed down by lassitude, although she deemed herself satisfied with life. What really caused her poignant satisfaction was her estimation of herself as the most seductive and eagerly sought-for woman of her time. Proud of her charm, of her irregular, bizarre, and captivating order of beauty, certain of the keenness of her intelligence, which enabled her to guess, forestall, and comprehend thousands of matters that others could not perceive, of her wit that so many talented men had appreciated, and ignorant of the limits that bounded her mental powers, she believed herself an almost unique being, a rare pearl existing in a mediocre world, a world that seemed to her empty and monotonous because she was too good for it. Never did she suspect for a moment that she was herself the cause of the continual ennui from which she suffered: she accused others of being the source of her melancholy. If they were not able to distract or amuse or even inspire her with passion, it was because they were lacking in pleasing qualities. She would say laughingly: "Everybody is wearisome. The only tolerable people are those that can amuse me, and simply because they can amuse me."

And the best way to please her was to succumb to her charm. Showing well that the only way to succeed in anything is to take pains, she bent all her intelligence in the direction of allurement, and nothing delighted her so much as to recognize the homage of a passion-kindled eye or wildly beating heart. She had been astounded at the difficulty encountered in the subjugation of André Mariolle, for it had been patent from the first moment that he admired her. Little by little she had succeeded in

sounding that secretly envious, subtle, and egotistical nature, and, laying herself out to vanquish him by peculiar attentions and preferences, aided by a natural sympathy she really felt, she had ended by attaining her end. For more than a month now she had watched him, perceiving him restless, taciturn, fighting against the impulse to make the avowal. Oh, those avowals! In her heart she did not enjoy them so very much, for when they were too direct, too eager, she was forced to be cruel and rigorous. What she liked best were delicate manifestations, semi-confidences, warily expressed illusions; and she displayed marvelous tact and address in compelling from her adorers this reserve in their worship of her. For more than a month had she been awaiting from Mariolle the confession, open or ambiguous, according to the nature of the owner, by which the oppressed heart solaces itself. He had said nothing, but he had written. It was a long letter—four pages! She held it in her hands, trembling with gratification, for a moment, then, throwing herself back in her *chaise-longue* and dropping off her little slippers so as to be more fully at ease, she began to read. A surprise awaited her. Mariolle told her in serious words that he refused to suffer at her hands; that he already knew her too well to consent to be enrolled among her victims. In polished phraseology, through which, however, one could detect the love he was controlling, he wrote that he was aware of her manner of treating those who had grown to love her; he confessed that he had fallen under her spell, but that he meant to escape by flight from the thraldom that menaced him. He was going away. The letter was a determined and eloquent farewell.

She read and reread with ever-increasing surprise those four pages of prose. Getting up from her seat, she slipped her feet again into her mules, and began to pace up and down, her sleeves thrown back, displaying her bare arms, her hands thrust into the little pockets of her dressing-gown, one of them clutching the crumpled letter. Stunned by this unexpected turn of affairs, she said to herself:

"He writes remarkably well, this boy: better than Lamarthe. There is sincerity, real feeling in this: not mere sentimentality."

Feeling inclined to smoke, she went up to the table with the array of silver-crested bottles and, selecting a Dresden box, took out a cigarette; then, having lit it, she walked over to the mirror, where she saw three pretty women appear in the three divisions. As she stopped short, she got quite close, made a slight bow and smile, a friendly little salute that meant: "Very pretty — very pretty!" She inspected her eyes, bared her teeth, raised her arms, placed her hands on her hips, and turned her profile so as to

see herself entirely in the three mirrors. Remaining thus, enveloped by the triple reflection of herself, she found the picture altogether charming; and, enraptured at being so beautiful, she felt an egotistical and physical pleasure in it, almost as sensuous as that of a man.

Every day she was accustomed to survey herself in this manner, and her maid, who occasionally surprised her, said once to her: "Madame looks at herself so much that she will end by wearing out all the mirrors in the house." But this self-admiration was the secret of her empire over those with whom she came in contact. By cultivating to their utmost the beauty of her face and the elegance of her form, by seeking and finding out all that could possibly enhance her physical advantages, by studying the almost imperceptible movements and shades of expression that would develop the natural grace of her attitudes and gait and increase the strange attractiveness of her eyes, by learning what made her more beautiful in her own eyes, she found out how to intensify the alluring power over man that was hers by birthright.

A little tired soon, by standing still in this manner, she said to her ever-smiling image (and the image moved its lips as if in echo): "All right! We'll see, Monsieur!" Then, crossing the room, she sat down at her desk.

This is what she wrote:

"Dear M. Mariolle: Come and see me to-morrow at four. I shall be alone, and I hope that I shall be able to reassure you as to the imaginary dangers that you dread. I call myself your friend, and I shall prove myself a sincere one. Michele de Burne."

It was a simple toilet that she wore to receive her

visitor next day; a gown of pale gray, gray with a tinge of lilac, as melancholy as the twilight, very plainly made, with a high, closely fitting collar, tight sleeves, a bodice that clung to her throat and waist, and a skirt that fitted closely to her hips. When he entered, looking slightly grave, she went toward him, holding out her hands. He kissed them, then sat down, and she waited, allowing the silence that followed to last some moments, in order to assure herself of his embarrassment. He did not know what to say and waited for her to speak. At last:

"Well, let us look the matter in the face!" she exclaimed. "What has come over you? Do you know that you have written me a very insolent letter?"

"I know I have," he replied, "and I apologize to you. I am, I always have been, excessively, brutally frank. I might have gone away without making the uncalled-for and wounding explanations that I addressed to you. But I thought it more loyal to follow the dictates of my nature and to trust to your comprehending it."

"Come, come!" she broke in. "What folly is this?"

He said impetuously:

"I would rather not discuss the matter."

"But I brought you here to discuss it," she interrupted quickly in her turn, "and we shall do so until you are quite convinced that you are running no risk."

She broke into a peal of laughter, laughter like that of a very young girl, and her simple gown, so like that of a convent girl, made the laugh seem all the more natural.

"I wrote you the truth, the absolute truth," he stammered; "the simple truth about myself."

"I know it," she answered, becoming serious. "This happens with all my friends. You wrote that I am an abominable coquette: I know that I am, but what then? No one dies as the result; I don't believe that any one even suffers. Of course there is what Lamarthe calls 'the crisis.' That is what you are undergoing now; but it will soon be over, and then comes—what shall I call it?—a sort of small fire in your hearts which does not cause pain and which I keep alive so that I may retain the fidelity, devotion, and attachment of my friends. Now what do you think of me? Am I not candid and sincere? How many women have you met who would dare to say to a man what I have just said to you?"

She spoke with a quaint and determined air, and with such simplicity and yet earnestness that he could not help smiling. "All your other friends," said he, "are men who have already passed through the fire, even before meeting you. Scorched and grilled, they were able to bear with equanimity the furnace in which you placed them; but as far as I am concerned, Madame, I have never been through that ordeal. And I have for some time past realized that it will be terrible if I allow myself to yield to the feeling that is developing in my heart."

She became familiar in her manner suddenly, and bending toward him, her hands crossed upon her knees, she said:

"Now, listen! I am speaking in all good faith. I hate to think that I am going to lose a friend simply on account of a chimerical fear. You are going to love me; that is granted; but the men of

the present day do not love the women of this period so intensely as to suffer any harm from it. Believe me: I am speaking of what I know well."

She remained silent a moment, and then went on, with the peculiar smile of a woman who is speaking the truth, but who believes she is lying:

"At any rate, I am not the sort of woman to be adored passionately. I am too modern. I shall be your friend, your pretty little friend, for whom you will feel affection—but nothing more than affection—I shall see to that."

Then, in a more serious tone, she added:

"In any case, I warn you that I am incapable of really loving any one, no matter whom: that I shall treat you just like the others, never any better. I have a horror of jealous men and tyrants. I was compelled to endure the despotism of a husband, but I am not obliged to accept at the hands of a mere friend the tyranny that is so often a calamity that grows out of cordial relations. You see, I am hiding nothing from you, that I speak to you as a comrade. Do you accept the rôle of loyal friend that I propose to you? If not, it is not too late. You can retire, whatever be the gravity of your case. There is safety in flight, you know."

He looked at her, already won by the magic of her voice, by the intoxication of her personality. He murmured, vibrating with a sense of her proximity:

"I accept the conditions, Madame; and if harm comes, so much the worse for me. You are worth running the risk for."

She stopped him as he was going to say more:

"No, that is enough," she said. "Let us never mention this again."

She went on to chat of indifferent matters. An hour later he left, in torture, for he really loved her, and with joy in his heart because he had promised her that he would stay.

CHAPTER III

DAILY INCENSE

HE was in torture because he loved her. Unlike the vulgar crowd to whom the chosen one of their heart appears surrounded by an aureole of perfection, he had grown to love her, although watching her with the clear-seeing eyes of a man who had never before known what love is. His unquiet, penetrating mind, always on the defensive, had preserved him from the influence of turbulent passions. A few intrigues, two short liaisons cut short by ennui, and some successful love-passages soon ended in disgust—such had been the romantic experiences of Mariolle. He considered woman as a useful institution for such men as required a well-kept house and children, or as a pleasant toy for such as desired the pastime of love-making.

In meeting Madame de Burne he had been warned against her by the confidences of his friends. What he knew of her interested, puzzled, and at-

tracted him, while at the same time it rather repelled him.

From principle he disapproved of players who did not play the game. After a few interviews he discovered that she was extremely interesting and invested with strong magnetic charm. The physical personality of this fair woman, who was at the same time plump and slim, with her superb arms, that looked as if made for embracing, and her long, slender legs, that seemed made for flight, appeared to him a symbol of vain hopes. Moreover, he had experienced in his intercourse with her a pleasure he never could have believed possible in conversing with a mere *mondaine*. Endowed with wit marked by spontaneity and unexpectedness, satirical with an irony that did not sting, she at times allowed herself to be influenced by romantic and even sentimental considerations, showing that beneath her mocking brilliancy there existed a fund of poetic tenderness, and this touch of inconsistency made her very captivating.

She made herself exceedingly agreeable to Marirolle, desiring to add him to her list of victims; and he visited her as often as he could, feeling attracted by her more and more as time went on. A sort of force seemed to emanate from her, drawing him to her: a force made up of smiles, glances, and words; and yet he often went from her presence with a feeling of irritation at something she had said or done. The more he felt himself enveloped by this mysterious magnetism, the more he fathomed and comprehended her nature, ardently wishing she were different. Still, the very characteristics that he disliked in her were the ones that allured him more effectively than her better qualities. Her

coquetry, as openly carried on as the toying with a fan by other women, her way of taking nothing seriously which had at first attracted, but now made him uneasy, her constant longing for excitement and novelty, at times exasperated him so much that he would, on leaving her, resolve to discontinue his visits gradually. But the next day he would inevitably find some pretext to return to her. What he felt more and more acutely as his infatuation increased was the insecurity of her affection and the reality of his suffering. He sank deeper and deeper in his obsession, like a man drowning from fatigue, whose boat has foundered far from shore. He was not blind; he knew her exactly as she was, the prescience of his passion having endowed him with clear-sightedness; still, he could not keep himself from constantly thinking about her.

With tireless persistency, he kept analyzing her character, seeking to penetrate the depths of that inscrutable feminine soul, that incomprehensible mixture of gay intelligence and triviality, of affection and inconstancy, of judgment and childishness, that astounding blend of contradictory traits.

How was it that she maintained this empire over him? He asked himself this question over and over again. He could not understand how, for with his reflective, observant, and proudly modest nature it was to have been expected that he would have been attracted by a woman with the old-fashioned virtues of tender gentleness and faithful affectionateness. But he encountered in this one a kind of new departure from the old order of things, a being excitingly original, one of those women who are the pioneers of a new generation, essentially different from their predecessors, and who diffuse around

them, even by their faults, the powerful attraction of a newly awakening force. After the dreamy and passionate women of the Restoration came the pleasure-loving daughters of the Empire—and here was another type of the protean yet eternal feminine, a creature of refined sensibility, of troubled, irresolute nature, who gave the idea of having been under the influence of all the narcotics that soothe or madden the nervous centers—under chloroform that stuns, under ether and morphine that lash the imagination, extinguish the reason, and nullify the emotions. He saw in her a being created to charm; a gem, exquisite and delicate, satisfying his eye, making his heart throb, exciting his longings—just as delicious and appetizing viands exhibited behind a plate-glass window tantalize the hunger of a starving passer-by.

Perceiving that he was slipping down the slope of an abyss, he began to reflect with terror on his situation. What would happen? What would she do? She would do precisely as she had done with all the rest—bring him to that condition in which a man obeys the caprices of a woman slavishly, as a dog follows the steps of his master, and then she would catalogue him in the list of her more or less valued favorites. But had she really treated all the others in this way? Had there never been an exception for whom she had truly cared for a month, a day, an hour, in one of those transports, so quickly repressed, to which her soul was subject?

Incessantly he discussed her with those others, as they came away from her dinners or soirées. He could see that they were still agitated, discontented, nervous—men whose hunger had never been satisfied by real food. No, she had certainly never

loved any of those drawing-room celebrities; therefore he, he who had never done aught to cause people to turn their heads or stare when he entered a salon or mingled in a crowd—what would he be in her eyes? Nothing—a mere nonentity, one who in the eyes of a brilliant woman becomes a sort of tame cat: an adjunct, useful and without flavor, like the *vin ordinaire* one uses with water at meals. If he had made himself a name he might have accepted this rôle; his renown would have made him able to afford the humiliation; but, as it was, he would have none of it, and so he sent her the letter of adieu. When he received her brief reply he was as overwhelmed as if some great boon had been accorded him, and when she had made him promise that he would not go away, he was as happy as if he had been delivered from some peril.

Several days passed without anything occurring, a calm—the lull that follows a storm—supervening the crisis. Then he felt, awakening in intensified violence, the passion that was devouring him. He had said that he would never again open the subject to her; but he had not promised never to write, and one evening, when he was kept from sleep by the insomnia of a lover, he sat down, almost in defiance of himself, and began to commit to paper an expression of his sufferings. It was not a letter; it was a collection of disjointed notes and phrases—throes of anguish transmuted into words. This soothed him: he felt relieved, and, going to bed, found he was able to sleep.

Next morning he read over what he had written, and putting the sheets of paper in an envelope, posted them to Madame de Burne. He fancied this document would not displease her: all women re-

gard a sincere love-letter with favor and infinite indulgence. Toward evening he went to her house, wondering how he would be received and what she would say to him. He found M. de Pradon there, smoking cigarettes and chatting with his daughter. Sometimes he passed hours in this way, for he treated her less like a child than a friend. There was in his intercourse with and affection for her a tinge of homage which she exacted from him just as she did from everybody else.

When she saw Mariolle come in, a flash of pleasure illumined her face; she held out her hand eagerly, and her smile said: "I am glad to see you!"

He hoped that the father would soon take his leave. But M. de Pradon did not go. In spite of his confidence in his daughter, he always watched her with a singular anxiety that was almost marital. This time he was inspired with curiosity to see how this new friend of hers would succeed; whether he was likely to have more luck than the others, what he was like, if he amounted to anything. Would he get his *congé,* or would he become a member of the band of intimates? So he stayed on, and Mariolle soon realized that there was no hope of his departure. He decided, therefore, to make a friend of him, judging wisely that an ally in the camp might prove a useful auxiliary.

So he laid himself out to be agreeable, and succeeded in being gay and amusing, exhibiting none of the symptoms of a woeful lover. Madame de Burne said to herself: "He is a clever fellow and acts comedy to perfection." And M. de Pradon thought: "Now, this is a level-headed young man; my daughter does not make a fool of him as she does so

many of the others." So when Mariolle saw fit to take his leave, he left them both delighted with him.

But he came out of that house in deep distress of mind. While with this woman, he realized the hold she had upon him, he felt that he should knock in vain at that heart, like a prisoner beating his fists in despair upon an iron door. He was most irretrievably enmeshed—there was no use in trying to escape from her; so, recognizing the futility of flight, he made up his mind to be wary, patient, cunning, tenacious: to conquer this woman by means of skill, by that homage for which she had so insatiable a longing, by the adoration that delighted her soul, and by the voluntary servitude that she had reduced him to. His letter had pleased her. He would write again. He did write. Almost every night, on getting home, at the hour when the mind, excited by the events of the day, sees everything in an exaggerated form, he sat down at his writing-table and began to think of her. The germ of poetry that so many men allow through indolence to perish in their souls wakes to life under conditions such as these. The super-excited ardor of his mind and his overwrought imagination sent forth words like sparks from a fire. Almost daily he wrote letters that seemed to consume his own heart, so intense was the fervor they breathed: for passionate letters of this kind are often more dangerous to the composer than to the recipient.

By working himself up to this state of effervescence, by exciting his brain with words and dwelling constantly upon one unchanging theme, he grew to lose, little by little, the notion of reality in connection with this woman. Ceasing to see her as she

had appeared to him at first, he ended by being able to see her only through the medium of his pen; and what he wrote night after night became to him a series of truths. This daily labor of idealization held her up to him in the guise in which she had appeared in his dreams of what she ought to be. His former resistance also fell before the evident affection that Madame de Burne now showed: for at this time, although no word had passed between them, there was no doubt that she preferred him to any other and openly manifested her favor.

He thought with a sort of ecstasy of hope that she might end by loving him some day. She was influenced in a peculiar manner by the power of his letters. Never had any one offered such worship and adulation as were conveyed in them and at the same time maintained the reserved attitude of Mariolle. Never had any of her adorers conceived this delicious idea of sending up to her bedside every morning by her maid, on a silver salver, this heavenly breakfast of sentiment in a paper envelope. What made it more effective was that he never mentioned the letters, seemed to ignore them, and remained to all appearance the most self-contained of her admirers, making no allusion to this daily torrent of adoration. She had, of course, received letters of this nature from others, but in quite another tone—more pressing, more audacious. For three months, the duration of the "crisis," Lamarthe had sent her a series of them, the clever, caressing love-letters of a literary man truly *épris,* the series ending only when he realized the hopelessness of his suit.

Mariolle's differed from Lamarthe's in their concentration of feeling, their sincerity of expres-

sion, submission and devotion, and Madame de Burne read them with a pleasure that no other writings had ever given her. Her friendship for him deepened, and she showed him increasing favor the more she perceived his absolute discretion. She keenly relished the originality of the situation. Up to this time she had been able, in spite of her vanity, to discern rival preoccupations in all the hearts disturbed by her; she had never reigned absolutely: there had always been chambers where she could not enter. Jealous of music with Massival, of literature with Lamarthe, she now met for the first time a being to whom she was all in all. The portly Fresnel had assuredly loved her as devotedly, but then, he was the portly Fresnel. She felt a kind of selfish gratitude to Mariolle for according her this triumph. A wish for his constant presence now began to beset her; a desire for his regard, his complete subjection. Although he did not offer her the flattery that others tendered her, he flattered her more by indirect means; by ministering to the attributes that govern the heart and spirit of a coquette—her pride of conquest and her desire for mastery. Like a monarch annexing a new country, she encroached upon his life by a series of small invasions day by day, organizing fêtes, theater parties, restaurant dinners; she dragged him at her chariot wheels continually, no longer able to exist without him, or rather without the incense of the vassalage to which he was reduced.

He submitted, happy in his captivity, caressed by her eyes, her voice, her caprices. Life now to him was one long transport of intoxicating desire.

CHAPTER IV

VICTORY

MARIOLLE had just come, and waited for Madame de Burne, who had not yet returned, although she had sent him a dispatch that morning asking him to call.

In that salon he always felt, despite his desire to be there and his keen appreciation of all that was beautiful in it, a sort of enervation and oppression that prevented him from sitting down and feeling at ease when his hostess was not present. He walked up and down in blissful expectation, tempered by a dread that some unforeseen obstacle should prevent her arrival and so postpone their meeting till the next day. When he heard the wheels of a carriage stop at the door, he quivered with hope that became certainty when the apartment bell sounded.

She came in, with her hat on her head, an unusual thing for her to do, and she looked joyful and hurried.

"I have a piece of news for you," she announced. "I am going away to the country."

His face fell.

"Oh! And you tell me a thing like that as if it were good news!"

"Yes. Sit down and I'll tell you all about it. You may or you may not know that Monsieur Valsaci, my mother's brother, is a civil engineer and bridge builder, and has a place at Avranches. He spends a great part of his time there, with his wife and children. Every summer we go and visit them there. Now, this summer I did not care to go, and this vexed him and he made a fuss about it to papa. Apropos of this, I must tell you that papa is jealous of you, and is always telling me that I am compromising myself with you. I'm afraid that you'll have to come here less often, but don't worry over this—I shall arrange matters. Well, to resume, papa gave me a scolding and made me promise to go to Avranches for ten or twelve days. We're going to leave on Tuesday morning. What do you say to this?"

"I say that you are breaking my heart."

"Is that all?"

"Well, what can I say or do? I can't prevent you from going."

"You don't see anything that can be done? Well, I do. Avranches is very near Mont St. Michel. Have you ever been to Mont St. Michel?"

"No, Madame."

"Very well. Next Friday you will become inspired with a desire to behold that marvel. On your way to it you will stop at Avranches on Saturday evening. At sundown you will be walking up and down in the public gardens that overlook the bay. Then we shall meet by chance. Papa will be very angry, but that does not matter. I shall get up a

party to go the next day to visit the Abbey—all of us together. You must be enthusiastic over the idea and make yourself extremely agreeable, as you are an adept at doing when you wish; you must make a favorable impression on my aunt and invite us all to dinner at the hotel. We shall all stay there all night, and you can return next day via St. Malo. Eight days later I shall be back in Paris. Is not this a fine plan? Am I not nice to you? ''

He murmured:

'' You are what I love best on earth! ''

'' Hush! '' she exclaimed.

For several moments they stood gazing at each other. She smiled up at him—a smile of sincere gratitude and sympathy, and he looked down with eyes that devoured her; he wanted to fall at her feet and roll there, to bite the hem of her skirt, to shout aloud: he yearned to express to her the passion that tortured him from his heels to his head, his soul as well as his body. He felt horribly sad because he could not avow to her his love, his inexpressible and delicious love. She knew all about it, though, without his expressing it, just as a good marksman knows when his bullet has hit the bull's eye. There was not a fiber in that man's frame that did not vibrate at her bidding; he was more her possession than she herself was. So she felt glad and said to herself that he was charming.

'' Then it's all arranged—we'll make the expedition? '' she asked good-humoredly.

'' Yes, Madame—it's all arranged,'' he answered, his voice husky with emotion. After a moment's pause she said: '' I mustn't detain you any longer to-day. I just came in to tell you about this, as we are leaving the day after to-morrow. I shall be

engaged all day to-morrow, and I have still four or five calls to pay to-day before dinner.''

He rose at once, his heart heavy, for his one desire was never to leave her; he kissed her hand and took his leave.

Four long days followed, days which he passed alone, preferring silence to voices, solitude to his friends. On Saturday morning he took the eight o'clock express. He had scarcely slept, feverish with the expectation of the journey. His dark, silent room, in which the only sound heard was that of the rolling by of fiacres, oppressed him like a prison.

As soon as the first light filtered through his curtains he jumped out of bed and scanned the sky —fears of bad weather had been haunting him. The sky promised a fine day. A light mist floated, presaging heat. He dressed much sooner than was necessary, being ready two hours too soon, chafing with impatience to be out of the house and on his way. He sent his servant to fetch a cab, before his toilet was completed, dreading his not being able to find one. The first jolting of the vehicle filled him with satisfaction, but when he entered the Montparnasse station he was disgusted to find that he had fifty minutes to wait. Finding an empty coach, he paid for the whole of it, so that he might dream undisturbed by fellow passengers. As soon as he felt the train gliding out with soft, even motion, his impatience, instead of being allayed, became more intense, and he felt an insane impulse to accelerate its pace by pushing on the cushioned partition in front of him. When Argentan was passed, the verdure of the Norman landscape attracted him. The train was passing through an

undulating country, with fertile valleys in which the peasants' habitations, their pastures and orchards were inclosed by rows of great trees whose tufted heads shone in the rays of the sun. It was toward the end of July, the season during which this part of France is at the height of its vitality and bloom.

In all the fields separated by those leafy walls, enormous oxen, cows with glaring patches of white in vague, bizarre designs on their flanks, reddish bulls, with big, curly foreheads, looking fierce and aggressive, succeeded each other indefinitely as the train rushed along this fresh, rich country, whose soil seemed to exude cider and beeves. Here and there a river would be seen, winding along at the foot of poplars under a thin veil of willows, or a stream would flash out from the grass, disappearing to show itself again unexpectedly a few moments later. Mariolle was distracted from his impatience by this rapid and continuous panorama of a lovely park diversified by orchards and herds. But when he had changed train at Folligny the overmastering desire to arrive took possession of him again, and during the last forty minutes he looked at his watch at least twenty times. At last he beheld, perched on a hill they were approaching, the city where she was awaiting him. The train was late, and only an hour separated him from the moment when they were to meet by chance on the public promenade.

As he alighted from the train he found an omnibus standing in readiness. It began to climb slowly the steep road leading to Avranches, which occupies the summit of a hill, and from a distance has rather the appearance of a fortress. Nearer, it is seen to be an ancient and pretty Norman town, with

small, regular houses, almost all alike, crowded one against the other, with a look of ancient pride and modest ease, a countrified and mediæval air.

As soon as Mariolle had thrown his suitcase into his bedroom at the hotel, he asked to be shown the street leading to the botanical gardens. He hurried along it, although he was too early, trusting that some happy accident might have caused her to arrive before the time. But as soon as he reached the gate he perceived that the gardens were almost empty. Three old men were walking up and down, old shopkeepers, natives evidently, who, no doubt, came every day to spend their evenings there together; and a family of English boys and girls, with long legs like colts, were playing around a blonde nursery governess who seemed to be day-dreaming. Mariolle, with beating heart, walked on, scrutinizing every alley as he came to it. He reached a wide avenue lined with leafy trees that seemed to stretch across the gardens, dividing them into two parts: passing through this, he approached a terrace that faced the horizon, and was completely carried away by what he beheld.

At the foot of the hill on whose summit he was standing spread an apparently interminable plain of sand which merged itself in the distance into the sea and the sky. A river meandered along this plain, and here and there under the flaming light of the sun pools of water diversified the sand like luminous plates of burnished metal. In the middle of the vast expanse of sand, still moist with the receding tide, there arose, twelve or fifteen kilometers from the shore, a monumental crag, surmounted by a cathedral. In all these immense dunes it had but one neighbor, Tombelaine, with its

rounded back, squatting amid its heaving mud shallows. Farther in the distance, on the surface of the shimmering water, could be discerned the tops of submerged rocks; and, the eye pursuing to the right its journey, discovered at the edge of the sandy waste the vast, green extent of Norman country, so covered with trees that it looked like an illimitable forest. This scene at one glance revealed Nature showing herself in two aspects—one of grandeur, vastness, and sublimity, the other of freshness, richness, and grace: the eye traveling back from the green, living forest to the apparition on the sands, that monolith crowned by a Gothic temple.

Mariolle had before now thrilled under the strange surprises that foreign lands offer to travelers; but this time the shock was so sudden that he stood rooted to the spot, his soul awed and softened. After some moments the clanging of a bell recalled him to things mundane, and to the feeling of happy expectancy that now animated him.

The gardens had remained almost empty; the three old gentlemen still promenaded the paths, but the English family had disappeared. Mariolle began to walk up and down. She would soon be here now: he would see her at the end of one of the paths leading to the wonderful terrace. What bliss! He felt her close at hand, somewhere near, not to be found or seen yet, but thinking of him, knowing that they would meet soon. He almost uttered a cry. A blue umbrella, only that, was visible among the trees. That was she—he knew. A little boy appeared, trundling a hoop in front of him, then two ladies, next two men, M. de Pradon and another.

She was all in blue, a blue like the sky in spring: he knew her already, although he could not distinguish her features. He did not dare to go forward and meet her, knowing he would blush and stammer, that he could not satisfactorily explain this accidental meeting under the cold, suspicious eye of M. de Pradon. Still he walked on, his eyeglass raised to scan the horizon. As he approached them she called out, not even taking the trouble to feign surprise at this *rencontre:* "How do you do, Monsieur de Mariolle? Isn't the view superb?"

Bewildered by this greeting, scarcely knowing what part to play, he stammered:

"Ah! is that you, Madame? What a fortunate accident! I wished to see this admirable country, and so——"

"And so you chose the very time when I was here! How very nice of you!" and then she proceeded to introduce her friends to each other.

"One of my friends, Monsieur de Mariolle—my aunt, Madame Valsaci; my uncle, the bridge builder."

She contrived that he should walk between herself and her aunt; then, shooting at him a very rapid glance, asked:

"What do you think of this region?"

"I don't think I ever saw anything more beautiful," he answered.

"Oh, but if you had been here as long as I have you would realize how this place influences you! The going out and coming in of the sea on those sands, that restless movement that never ceases, bathing the whole expanse twice a day and so quickly that a galloping horse cannot escape from it. This wonderful sight open to every eye for

nothing moves me inexpressibly; really, I am quite carried away by it. Am I not, aunt?"

Madame Valsaci, a gentlewoman of mature years, with silvery hair, the wife of a civil engineer of good standing, acknowledged that she had never seen her niece so moved by anything before. Then she added, after reflection:

"It is not surprising, though, when one remembers that she scarcely ever sees or admires any scenery except that at theaters."

"But I go to Dieppe and Trouville almost every year!"

The elder lady laughed:

"One goes to Dieppe and Trouville just to meet one's friends. The sea is placed there simply for bathers who make rendezvous."

This was said very ingenuously, perhaps without any *arrière-pensée*. They returned to the terrace: it drew their steps irresistibly—in spite of themselves they always found that they were heading toward it, just as balls roll down a slope. The descending sun was weaving a curtain of transparent cloth of gold behind the silhouette of the Abbey, which grew darker and darker, looking like a gigantic reliquary under a golden veil. But Mariolle saw nothing except the adorable blonde face enveloped in a cloud of blue at his side. She was changed, somehow, yet never had he seen her look so deliciously fresh and radiant, with a freshness that seemed to pervade her eyes, her hair, her entire body, and even her soul; a freshness drawn from this lovely country, its sky, its clear light and verdure. Never had he felt he loved her so deeply. He walked on beside her, finding nothing to say: the contact of her dress, the occasional jostling of

her arm against his, the eloquent interchange of glances, annihilated him completely, just as if they had deprived him of his personality. He felt himself becoming destroyed by the proximity of this woman, absorbed by her until there remained nothing of himself—nothing but a longing, an appeal and adoration. She had done away with his former self, just as she would have reduced a letter to thin ashes in the flames.

She was fully aware of this utter victory; and touched by it, vibrating and tender, more alive to all emotional influences in this vital air so full of the sea and the sap of the land, she said, without looking at him:

"I am so glad to see you!" Then added immediately: "How long are you going to stay?"

"Two days—counting to-day as one."

Then, turning to the aunt, he said: "Will you and Monsieur Valsaci do me the honor to spend the day with me to-morrow at Mont St. Michel?"

Madame de Burne answered for her relative:

"I shan't allow her to refuse—since we have been so lucky as to meet you here." The engineer's wife added:

"Yes, Monsieur, we shall be very pleased to go, provided you come and take dinner with us this evening."

He bowed and accepted. Suddenly he became conscious of a delirious joy, a joy like that that takes possession of one on receiving news of a great piece of good fortune, ardently longed for. But what had he obtained? What important event had occurred in his life? None: and yet he felt himself carried away by this intoxication of an indefinable presentiment. They promenaded for a long

time on the terrace, waiting to see the sun go down, to gaze until the last moment at the silhouette of the Mont projected against the fiery horizon. They chatted now on ordinary topics, such as could be discussed in the presence of a third person, from time to time exchanging stolen glances. Then, the sun disappearing, they wended their way to the villa of the Valsacis, situated in the suburbs and surrounded by beautiful grounds overlooking the bay.

Desiring to be prudent, and worried, moreover, by the cold and almost hostile attitude of M. de Pradon, Mariolle left early. When he was bending over the hand of Madame de Burne to kiss it in parting salutation, she murmured, with a peculiar intonation: "*A demain—à demain!*"

Immediately after his going, M. and Madame Valsaci, who kept early hours, proposed that all should go to bed.

"You go," said Madame de Burne. "As for me, I shall go and take a turn in the garden."

"I shall, too," remarked her father.

She went out wrapped in a shawl, and they began to walk up and down the white sand of the garden paths, which, in the bright moonlight, looked like little rivers meandering between the turf and flower beds. After a long silence, M. de Pradon said in a low tone:

"My dear child, you will do me the justice to allow that I have never troubled you with any advice."

She had felt it coming, and was ready with an answer:

"I beg pardon, papa; you did once give me a piece of advice."

"I?"

"Yes, you. And very bad advice it was. Therefore I am fully determined, if you ever give me any more, not to follow it."

"What advice did I ever give you?"

"You advised me to marry Monsieur de Burne. That was advice that proved you to be wanting in judgment, clear-sightedness, and in knowledge of men in general and your daughter in particular."

He kept silence for some minutes, rather surprised and embarrassed, then:

"Yes, I made a mistake that time," he acknowledged. "But I am quite sure that I am making no mistake in the paternal advice that I am now about to offer."

"Well, let me hear it, then, papa."

"You are on the point of compromising yourself——"

She began to laugh—a little laugh that came too quickly.

"With Monsieur Mariolle, no doubt?"

"With Monsieur Mariolle."

"You forget, papa," she rejoined, "that according to you I have compromised myself with Monsieur Georges de Maltry, Monsieur de Lamarthe, Monsieur Massival, and others of whom you have been jealous: for I never can accept the least attention from an agreeable friend without all my troop bursting into fury, you at their head; you who——"

"No, no!" he broke in. "You have never compromised yourself with any one. On the contrary, you are most tactful in your relations with all your friends."

"Dear papa, I am no longer a little girl," she

answered vexedly. "I promise that I shall not compromise myself with Monsieur Mariolle any more than with the rest. You need not fear. But I acknowledge that I did ask him to come here: I like him; he is just as clever and much less egotistical than any of our other friends. You used to say this, too, until you discovered that I had a slight predilection in his favor. And since this friend is agreeable to me, I thought it would be pleasant if we could all make a little excursion together: it is foolish to deprive one's self of pleasure when there is no harm nor danger in it. How can I run any risk of being compromised if you are there, as well?" She laughed frankly now, knowing that every word she had said had told; and he remained mute, irritated, displeased, and embarrassed.

"Don't worry," she went on. "What can there be more proper at this season of the year than to make a trip to Mont St. Michel with my father, my uncle, my aunt, and a friend? And, in any case, who will know of it? Once we are back in Paris, Monsieur Mariolle will be relegated to his place with the others once more."

"Very well," said her father. "Let it be as if I had not spoken."

They walked up and down a little longer, then M. de Pradon said:

"Shall we go in? I am tired and want to go to bed."

"No," answered she, "I want to stay out longer, the night is so beautiful."

"Then don't go far," her father warned. "One never knows whom one may meet."

"Oh, I shall stay right under the windows."

He kissed her on the forehead and went in. She

sat down on a little bench at the foot of an oak. The night was warm, full of exhalations from the earth, mingled with the smell of the sea. A misty light now hovered over everything, for the bay in the moonlight was shrouded in a veil of mist that rose like white smoke, hiding the dunes, now covered by the tide. Madame de Burne, her hands crossed, her eyes fixed on the distance, tried to look into her soul through a fog as impenetrable as that overhanging the sands. Many a time in her dressing-room in Paris had she, sitting in this attitude, asked herself:

"What do I love? What do I desire? What do I hope for? What do I wish? What am I?"

Apart from the pleasure that she felt in her own personality and the intense desire to please, she had never experienced any vivid emotion, except now and then a fleeting feeling of curiosity, quickly dying out. She was well aware of this, being too much in the habit of closely studying her face and all her person not to observe her soul also. Up to now she had merely felt a vague interest in other people, incapable as they were of inspiring her with passion, capable at the most of amusing her. And yet, when she had felt awakening in her a preference for any one, when any rival disputing with her for the possession of an admirer roused her feminine instincts in favor of him and caused to spring to birth a feeling of attachment, she had discovered in these false starts of love a pleasure much more acute than the gratification of ambition. Still, these preferences always withered and died. Why? She grew wearied, disgusted—perhaps because she was too clear-sighted. Everything that had at first attracted her to a man, everything that had animated

and allured her, soon began to appear hackneyed, tiresome, banal. All men were so similar—without being identical, in disposition; no man she had ever met appeared endowed with attributes calculated to retain affection or inspire love.

Was it their fault or hers? Were they lacking in what she required, or was she without the power to love? Do human beings love because they meet others created with the qualities that satisfy wants inherent in themselves, or do they love simply because they are born with the faculty of loving? Sometimes it seemed to her as if other people's hearts were endowed with arms, arms tender and outstretched to draw, to clasp and embrace, and that her heart was different: it had only eyes, no arms. How often she had noticed men of undoubted talent and other fine attributes falling in love with girls unworthy of them, silly, worthless, even plain girls. How did this happen, and why? It was a mystery. It could not be due to any providential intervention, this crisis in the lives of beings, but to some germ that was communicated and developed instantly. She had listened to confidences, she had surprised secrets, she had even seen with her own eyes the sudden transfiguration of the soul that accompanies this intoxication, and she had pondered much over these things.

In society, in the constant round of visits, teas, dinners, and other idiocies by means of which the leisure classes kill time, she had discovered with jealous, envious, and almost incredulous surprise, beings, men and women both, in whom extraordinary results are produced by this influence. These results were not shown in any striking, conspicuous way; but with her restless penetration she had felt

and divined them. The faces of those under the spell betrayed them; their voices, their smiles, above all their eyes, by a something inexpressible, indescribable: a delicious happiness, a joy of the soul overflowing into the body and illuminating it. Without knowing why, she felt annoyed by this. Lovers always irritated her, and she told herself that this vague feeling of dissatisfaction proceeded from disdain. She found them out with infallible sureness and penetration, having often detected and revealed liaisons long before society at large had been aware of them.

When she mused over the tender folly into which the existence of another being can lure us, the agitation, the bliss which a voice, sight, touch can evoke, she felt certain that she could never experience love. Still, when wearied of all around her, beset by indefinable yearnings, tormented by a gnawing desire for change and novelty, that was perhaps nothing but a vague hungering for affection, she had sometimes wished with a secret shame born of her pride that she might meet some man who could inspire her, if only for a little time, a few months, with that bewitching ecstasy of mind and body. Life under those conditions seemed to be invested with such a wonderful light of happiness. Not only had she wished for this meeting—she had even tried to make it happen—but not very hard, desisting soon, through that indolence that made her so seldom persist in any enterprise she undertook.

All those beginnings of attraction toward men said to be possessed of exceptional attributes who dazzled her for perhaps a few weeks ended in disillusion. She expected too much of them—of their nature, their character, their delicacy of mind.

After each of these disappointments, she was forced to acknowledge that the defects of eminent men were more salient than their good qualities: that talent is a special gift, like good sight or a sound digestion, a gift pertaining to the studio, an isolated gift, bearing no relation to those personal traits which make association with the possessor attractive and agreeable.

Since she had met Mariolle, she found that she felt peculiarly drawn toward him. Did she love him? Was this love? Without prestige, without renown, he had conquered her by force of his affection, his tenderness, his loyalty, by all the true and simple traits of his character. He had conquered her, for she thought of him continually, she desired his presence continually: no other being she had ever met was so agreeable, so sympathetic, so indispensable to her. Was this love?

She did not feel that excitation of the soul that she had heard described; but, for the first time in her life, she experienced a sincere desire to be for a man something more than a fascinating woman. Did she love him? In order to love was it necessary that the object should be invested with exceptional attractions, different from and above all other men's? That he should exist in an aureole of light proceeding from the heart of the one who adored? Or was it sufficient that he should please you very much—so much you could scarcely do without him?

In this latter case she loved Mariolle, or, at least, she was very near to loving him. After reflecting for a long time and with acuteness, she concluded: "Yes, I must love him, no doubt; but the trouble is, I am deficient in feeling: it is a lack in my make-up."

And yet she had been conscious of a thrill of feeling when she saw him coming toward her on the terrace of the garden that evening. For the first time she had experienced that indescribable impulse that draws one human being to another: she had felt pleasure in walking near him, in having him near her, vibrating with love for her, in watching by his side the sun setting behind Mont St. Michel, that sight that seems like a vision described in a legend. Love itself, was it not a sort of legend of the soul?—a legend believed in by some from instinct, in the case of others simply because by always dwelling on it they grow to have faith in it. Would this be the way with her? She had felt a strange desire to lay her head on the shoulder of this man, to be close to him. Yes, she had felt differently toward him, compared with what she felt toward others, and she felt so now, at this moment, at the bottom of her heart. Perhaps she needed to yield to this impulse a little for it to become the real thing. She always resisted too much, she reasoned too much, she fought against the charm of others. Would it not be sweet on such a night as this to wander with him under the willows beside the river, and to recompense him fully for his devotion by offering him her lips from time to time?

The window opened. She turned her head: it was her father, who was, no doubt, looking for her. She cried:

"You're not asleep yet?"

"If you don't come in, you'll catch cold!" he answered.

She got up and went into the house. When she had gained her room, she pushed back the curtains to look out at the vapors growing whiter and whiter

in the moonlight: and it seemed to her that the vapors in her heart also were growing purified in the light of this new tenderness.

She slept well, however, and was awakened by her maid early, for they were to start immediately after breakfast so as to take luncheon at the Mont.

A drag came for them. Hearing wheels grate on the graveled drive, she bent out of the window and immediately her eyes met those of André Mariolle, searching for hers. Her heart began to beat fast. She was surprised at this new impression in regard to that palpitating muscle that pumps the blood more energetically at the proximity of certain beings. Again she repeated the words that had been on her lips in dropping off to sleep: "Am I really going to love him?" When she came face to face with him she saw him so *épris,* so overwhelmed with love for her that she longed to clasp him in her arms and offer him her lips. One glance only they exchanged, but that sufficed to make him turn white with happiness.

The vehicle started on its way. It was a bright summer morning, full of radiance and the songs of birds. Down the hill, across the river, and through the villages they went, by a stony road that jolted them about on the seats of the drag. Madame de Burne, after some time, began to joke her uncle on the condition of the roads, and this broke the ice and every one began to talk and laugh. Suddenly, in emerging from a hamlet, the bay came into view, not an expanse of yellow sand as on the previous evening, but a sheet of glittering water, the sands, the meadows, and even the road itself farther on being salted, the driver informed them.

For the next hour they went on slowly, so as

to allow time for the tide to turn. Rows of elms and oaks dividing the fields from one another now hid from time to time the great outline of the Abbey, mounted on its pedestal of rock, at the present moment in the midst of the waters; then it would reappear suddenly, larger and more impressive at each return to sight.

Michèle de Burne and André Mariolle gazed upon it with increasing awe and admiration; then their glances met. The poetry of this stony apparition bathed in the soft vital radiance of the July morning appealed to them both.

The others were chatting with friendly amiability. Madame Valsaci was relating tragic accidents she had known of in this locality, men swallowed up without warning by quicksands, others overtaken by the tide. Her husband was defending the embankment that has been so execrated by artists: arguing that it afforded many uninterrupted views of the Mont, and, moreover, had reclaimed land for pasturage and later for cultivation. Suddenly they stopped. The sea was overflowing the road. Not that there was much to be seen: just a moisture darkening the stony road; but it indicated to those who knew that farther on there would be treacherous spots and impassable places. They must stop and wait.

"It won't be long now: it's going down fast," observed M. Valsaci, pointing with his finger to the road from which the thin coating of liquid was disappearing as if drunk in by the earth or pulled down by some mysterious force. They alighted so as to watch the strange, rapid, silent departure of the sea; step by step they followed it on. Already green spots were appearing in the receding water,

the submerged pasturages beginning to lift their heads. These spots became larger, grew round, and finally appeared like islands. Later they seemed like continents separated from each other by miniature oceans, and by and by the whole gulf was in view, abandoned by the tide. Its recession seemed like the drawing back of a gigantic silver veil, a veil full of large rents, the rents growing larger and swallowing the veil, which thus entirely disappeared from the meadows, not yet, however, uncovering the yellow dunes. They climbed back into the drag again, and everybody stood so as to see better. The road was drying, and the horses went on, but still quite slowly, and the jolting causing them to lose their equilibrium, Mariolle suddenly felt the shoulder of Madame de Burne leaning upon his. At first he thought that this proceeded from accident, but she stayed in the same position, and every turn of the wheels brought a repetition of the hammering contact, causing his heart to bound and his frame to tremble. He no longer dared to look at the young woman, paralyzed by this unhoped-for familiarity, and thought deliriously: "Is it possible? Am I dreaming, or are we both losing our heads?"

The horses began to trot, and they all had to sit down. Mariolle felt a sudden, mysterious impulse to be polite to M. de Pradon, and he began to tender him flattering attentions. Almost as susceptible as his daughter to compliments, the old gentleman quickly responded to this behavior and was soon smiling radiantly.

Now the drag had reached the embankment and was directing itself toward the Mont, at the end of this road, built high above the sands. The River

Pontorson flowed at its left: to the right the meadows covered with fine turf called "la Criste marine" were now succeeded by the dunes, still moist and impregnated by the sea.

And still the great Abbey seemed to loom higher and higher toward the blue sky, against which it was now clearly projected in all its details, its crest ornamented with steeples and tiny towers, and the grimacing gargoyles and hairy monsters with which the terrified superstition of our ancestors was wont to crown its Gothic sanctuaries. It was almost one o'clock when they reached the hotel where luncheon had been ordered. They were all very hungry and went gladly to the table: every one appeared in good humor, and two hearts were sensible of the approach of happiness. At dessert, when the good luncheon, the champagne and the bright conversation had put everybody into a frame of mind to see every proposition through *couleur-de-rose* glasses, Mariolle asked: "How would it do to stay over until to-morrow? Don't you think it would be pleasant to have dinner here and see all this by moonlight?"

Madame de Burne agreed at once, and the men, also; but Madame Valsaci demurred because of her little boy left at home. Her husband, however, reassured her, saying that the child had often been left in this manner for one night, and at once wrote out a dispatch to send to the nursery governess. He had taken a great fancy to Mariolle, who had approved of the embankment, and had not said as so many did that it spoiled the view of the Mont.

On leaving the table they went to visit the Abbey, taking the road on the ramparts. The town, a mass of mediæval houses crowded one upon another on

the block of granite that bears the Abbey on its summit, is separated from the sands by a high, battlemented wall. This wall winds upward with bends sharp and rounded, with platforms, watch-towers, one surprise after another for the eye, which at every convolution discovers a new widening of the immense horizon. All were silent, out of breath with climbing so soon after a very good luncheon and peculiarly impressed at seeing appear and disappear the huge edifice that was their goal. There above them it seemed suspended in the sky, an enormous tangle of spires and belfries, of granite hewn into flowers, of flying buttresses, of arches reaching from tower to tower, a marvelous masterpiece of massive yet delicate architectural lace, thrown out against the celestial azure from which it seemed to menace them with a fantastic army of gargoyles with bestial faces. Between the sea and the Abbey, on the northern flank of the Mont, a steep slope called the "Forest," on account of being covered with old trees, makes a dark green spot against the illimitable plain of sand.

Michèle de Burne and André Mariolle, who were walking in front of the others, stopped still to look. She leaned on his arm, dizzy with an emotion she had never yet experienced. She was climbing, light and alert, ready to climb forever with him toward that wonderful edifice and toward something else also. She could have wished this steep road to be an endless one, for for the first time in her life she was tasting happiness. She murmured:

"Heavens, how beautiful!"

"I can see nothing—except you!" he replied, gazing at her.

With a smile, she answered: "I am not usually

poetical, but this is so wonderful that I feel myself completely carried away by it."

"I love you to madness," he whispered. He was conscious of her arm slightly pressing his, and they went on.

A guardian met them at the Abbey gate, and they entered by a superb staircase between two enormous towers that conducted them to the guard-room. From thence they went on from room to room, courtyard to courtyard, dungeon to dungeon, listening with wonder, enchanted by all they saw: entering the great crypt with its exquisite columns, which with all their wondrous beauty are so prodigiously strong that they support not only the entire choir of the cathedral, but all the Merveille, a formidable construction in three stories, three Gothic piles, rising one above the other, the most stupendous masterpiece of the architecture produced by the military monasticism of the Middle Ages. Next came the cloister. Their surprise was so great at its surpassing beauty that they stood stock still before that great courtyard containing the lightest, most graceful, and most charming colonnade of any cloister on earth. In two rows the slender, delicate columns, crowned with delicious capitals, bear through the entire length of the four galleries an uninterrupted wreath of Gothic ornamentation, showing infinite variety and inexhaustible invention, the fruit of those artists of the Middle Ages who, abounding in imagination, wrought their dreams and visions into stone with hammer and chisel.

Madame de Burne and Mariolle went around slowly, arm in arm; while the rest, a little weary, admired the cloister from a distance.

"Oh, how heavenly all this is!" she cried, stopping all at once.

"I know nothing. I see nothing. I do not even know whether I exist. All I know is that you are near me," he answered. Then she looked him full in the face and, smiling, murmured:

"André!"

He knew then that she was his. They said nothing more, but went on, blind to all the wonders they passed by until reaching the lace staircase, which is so beautiful that it distracted them for a moment, imprisoned as it is in an arch thrown out between two belfries, to climb, it would seem, to the clouds; and they were again seized with astonishment when they reached the Chemin des Fous, a dizzy path of granite, winding without any handrail, almost to the last turn.

"Can one walk there?" asked Michèle.

"No, it is forbidden," answered the guide.

She showed him a twenty-franc piece. The man hesitated. All the family, already giddy, suspended as they were above the abyss below, opposed this imprudence.

"Would you dare to go?" she asked Mariolle. He smiled. "I have climbed worse places than that," he affirmed.

Paying no attention to the remonstrances of the others, they began to mount. He went ahead on the narrow ledge overhanging the abyss, and she followed him along the shelf, her eyes avoiding the immensity beneath, faint with terror now, her hand desperately gripping the one he held down to her. She could feel that he was composed and steady, sure of his head and of his footing, and she thought, even in the midst of her terror: "Truly, this is a man!" There they were alone together, sur-

rounded by illimitable space, as high up as the sea-birds go, commanding the same horizon as the white-winged gulls, who roam aloft, ceaselessly exploring with their yellow eyes. Feeling her tremble, Mariolle asked:

"You are dizzy?"

"A little—but with you I fear nothing," she murmured in answer. Then, drawing nearer, he placed his arm around her, to support her, and she was so reassured by the help that she raised her head and gazed about her. He was almost carrying her: she enjoyed the strong protection that enabled her to look around so close to heaven, and she felt grateful to him with a feminine impulse that he did not, by trying to kiss her, sully this supreme part of the expedition.

When they rejoined the others, who, racked by anxiety, had been awaiting them, M. de Pradon said to his daughter:

"Good God! What an idiotic thing to do!"

"No," she said firmly. "It ended successfully. Nothing can be idiotic that ends successfully."

He shrugged his shoulders, and they went on their downward way. After buying photographs, they proceeded to the hotel, where it was almost dinner time. The hostess advised her guests to take a walk along the sands, so as to see the Abbey from the side of the open sea, where, she said, it presents its most magnificent aspect. Although tired, the party set off, and went around the ramparts, going out some distance on the dune, whose hard-looking surface was in places treacherously soft. From this side the Abbey changes its appearance from that of a marine cathedral to that of a feudal castle, as if to threaten the invading ocean

with its crenelated wall pierced with loopholes and sustained by gigantic buttresses.

But Michèle de Burne and André Mariolle paid little attention to all this. They were thinking only of each other, enmeshed in the net which each had spread for the other, immured in that prison where one knows nothing of what goes on around. When they found themselves under the light of the lamps, at the dinner table, they appeared to awaken to earthly things, and they even made the discovery that they were extremely hungry. The party remained long at the table, and when dinner was over they forgot all about the moonlight, engrossed in pleasant conversation. No one seemed to wish to go out, and no one proposed it. In vain the full moon invested with poetic gleams the shallow flood of rising tide, imperceptibly slipping up over the sands: in vain she lit up the serpentine ramparts, and illuminated the outlines of the Abbey with her softening, enchanting beams. No one seemed to care to see anything more.

It was not ten o'clock when Madame Valsaci, overcome with sleep, proposed that all should retire. The idea met with unanimous approval, and after exchanging cordial good-nights, they separated.

André Mariolle knew well that he would not sleep. He lit the two candles on his mantel, opened his window, and looked out into the night. All his being was unnerved by the torture of vain hopes. He knew that she was there, quite near, separated from him only by two doors, and it was almost as impossible to go to her as to turn back that tide that was slowly creeping up on the dunes outside. He felt a desire to cry aloud in a torture of inap-

peasable longing and expectation, asking himself what he should do, for he felt that he could not endure the solitude of this evening of fruitless happiness.

Gradually all sounds had died away in the hotel and in the one winding street of the town. Mariolle remained leaning out of the window, knowing only that time was passing, watching the silver surface of the high tide, and putting off the hour of retiring, as if he had a presentiment of some inexplicable good fortune. All at once it seemed as if a hand touched the handle of his door; he started and looked round. A woman with her head veiled in white lace, and wearing one of those *robes-de-chambre* that look as if made of snow and silk and lace, entered, She carefully closed the door behind her; then, as if she had not seen him standing, overwhelmed with joy, in the open frame of his window, she walked straight to the mantel and extinguished the two candles.

CHAPTER V

A NEW EDEN

THEY were to meet again to say good-by the next morning, before the door of the hotel. André Mariolle, who was the first to come down, awaited her with a strange mixture of anxiety and happiness. What would he do? How would she act? What would become of her and of him? What sort of adventure was this in which he had embarked—disastrous or happy? She could make of him whatever she wished—a dreamer, similar to an opium fiend, or a martyr, just as she thought fit. He walked up and down beside the two carriages—for they were now to separate: he to go back by St. Malo, so as to carry out the story she had invented, they to return to Avranches.

When would he see her again? Would she curtail her visit to the Valsacis, or would she prolong it? He had a terrible dread of her first look and of her first words, for he had not seen her at all and

they had scarcely spoken during their brief embrace of the preceding night. She had murmured over her shoulder at the door, as she went out with her rapid, noiseless tread: *"A demain, mon ami!"*

He heard her voice and trembled. She was speaking in a loud tone, apparently irritated by some remark of her father's, and when André saw her on the lowest step of the staircase, she wore the tell-tale pout of impatience on her lips.

Mariolle stepped forward. She saw him and began to smile. In her eyes, now calm and peaceful, a light of sweetness appeared that communicated itself to the rest of her face. Then, in the hand suddenly and tenderly offered, he saw the confirmation without restraint and without repentance of her self-bestowal.

"Then we must part!" said she.

"Alas! Madame, I feel it more than I dare to express."

"It will not be for long," she murmured. Then, as M. de Pradon approached to join them, she whispered:

"Say that you are going to make a ten days' tour in Brittany—but don't make it."

Madame Valsaci, much excited, appeared:

"What is this that your father tells me? That you are to leave the day after to-morrow! Why, I thought you were to stay until a week from Monday!"

Madame de Burne said gloomily:

"Papa always puts his foot in it. He knows I am almost certain to get neuralgia if I stay for any length of time at the seaside, and I am merely trying to avoid an attack. But this is scarcely the time to discuss the matter."

Mariolle's driver now came to ask him to get in at once, as he was afraid they might otherwise miss the train for Pontorson.

"When do you go to Paris?" asked Madame de Burne.

He hesitated a moment.

"Well, I can hardly tell," he answered. "I wish to visit St. Malo, Brest, Douarnenez, the Bay of Trépasses, Pointe du Raz, Audierne, Penmarch, Le Morbihan; in fact, all the places of interest in the Breton peninsula. This will take——"

After a silence, during which he was supposed to be making a careful calculation:

"Fifteen or twenty days," he concluded, with exaggeration.

"That's a long time," she replied, laughing. "As far as I'm concerned, if I have another nervous attack such as I had last night, I shall be obliged to return in two days."

Almost suffocated with emotion, he longed to cry out: "Thank you!" But he contented himself with kissing the hand which she extended for a farewell salutation, and after a thousand thanks, compliments, and assurances of sympathy, exchanged by him with the Valsacis and M. de Pradon, the latter reassured to some extent by hearing the announcement of the Brittany trip, he climbed into his carriage and departed, his head turned toward her to the last. He returned at once to Paris, seeing nothing all through his return journey; all night long, sitting back in a corner of the carriage, his eyes half shut, his arms crossed, his soul plunged in revery, he did nothing but live over and over again the realization of his dream.

As soon as he had reached home, from the mo-

ment of his return in the silence of his library, where he worked and wrote in the company of his books, his piano, and his violin, there began for him that torture of impatience, the harassing chafing that is the curse of insatiable hearts. Surprised at finding himself incapable of feeling interest in any pursuit, unable not only to concentrate his mind, but to keep from gnawing restlessness by busying himself in his usual manner with music and reading, he wondered what he could do to combat this new trouble. A desire to go out, to walk about, seemed to possess him constantly: a crisis of the body brought about by the state of the mind—simply an instinctive and inappeasable longing to go in search of some one.

He put on his coat and hat and opened the door; in descending the steps he asked himself: "Where shall I go?" Then an idea that had not yet occurred to him suggested itself: they would require a rendezvous for their meetings—some pretty and secret place. He went up and down the avenues, then the streets and boulevards, anxiously interviewing concierges with benevolent smiles and landladies with doubtful expressions, seeing apartments with unsatisfactory hangings and carpets, and returned at night, discouraged. At nine the next morning he recommenced his quest, and ended by discovering at nightfall, in a quiet street in Auteuil, at the end of a garden with three exits, a quiet cottage that an upholsterer in the neighborhood promised to furnish in two days. Mariolle described what he wanted—very simple furniture in varnished pine, and thick, good carpets. The garden was in the charge of a baker who lived close to one of the gates; an arrangement was made with the baker's wife to take care of the rooms, and orders given to a florist

to keep them supplied with flowers and plants. All this took him till nearly eight o'clock, and when he got home, tired out, he found with a pulsing heart a dispatch on his bureau awaiting him. Opening it he read:

"Shall be back to-morrow evening. Am sending letter with instructions. MICHE."

He had not yet written to her, fearing that his letter might go astray, as he did not know exactly when she would leave Avranches. As soon as he had dined he sat down at his writing table to pour out what was seething in his soul. This was a long and difficult task, for every expression, every idea that suggested itself, appeared clumsy, feeble, mediocre, totally inadequate to convey the passionate gratitude that inspired him.

The letter which he got from her early next morning confirmed her intention of returning that evening, and begged him not to allow himself to be seen by any one for some days in order to be able to give out the story of the Brittany trip. In it she also asked him to promenade next morning toward ten on the terrace bordering on the Seine in the Garden of the Tuileries. He got there an hour too soon and wandered about in the great garden, only peopled at that hour by early risers going to work, bureaucrats hurrying to the Ministries on the left bank of the Seine, clerks, shop girls, workers of all descriptions. He experienced a reflective pleasure in contemplating these hurried people whom the necessity for daily bread condemned to brutalizing forms of work, and comparing them to himself, at this hour on the point of meeting his mistress, one of the queens of society, he felt himself to be a fortunate and privileged being and thanked the blue

sky above: for Providence was to him but the alternations of blue sky and rain, due to chance—the crafty overseer of things and men.

"She's sure to be late," he thought. Scarcely, however, had the idea occurred to him, when the clock in a near-by tower sounded out the ten strokes, and he imagined he saw her cross the garden, hurrying along like a working girl hastening to get to her shop. He hesitated. "Can it be she?" He recognized her gait, but was surprised at her changed appearance, so simple and plain in her modest dark suit. She walked straight to the stairs mounting to the terrace, as if she were accustomed to take her way often there.

"She must like this place," he thought, "and come here at times to walk." He watched her raise her skirt to place her foot on the first step, then trip lightly up the rest. He went forward to meet her; she said, as soon as they were close enough together to speak:

"How imprudent you are!" anxiously. "You must not show yourself like that; I have seen you ever since I was over at the Rue de Rivoli! Come and let us sit down—back there, behind the Orangery. Now, this is where you must wait for me next time."

"Then you often come here?" he could not help asking.

"Yes, indeed. I like the place; and, as I am fond of early walks, I come here to take exercise and to admire the landscape, which is very pretty. Besides, here one never meets anybody, while the Bois is impossible. But do not reveal the secret."

"Never fear!" he laughed.

Taking hold of her hand, a tiny hand hidden in

the fold of her coat, he sighed: "Oh! how I love you! How long it seemed since I had left you! Did you get my letter?"

"Yes, thank you. I was glad to get it."

"Then you are not angry with me?"

"No. Why should I be? You are too nice for me to be angry with you."

He tried to find words vibrant with gratitude and love, ardent words; but none that he found suitable would come. So he repeated, too overcome to wait:

"How I love you!"

"The reason why I made you come here," she said, "was because there are water and boats; but even then it does not look like Avranches. Still, it is not bad."

They were sitting on a bench near the stone balustrade that runs along the river, almost alone, invisible from all parts; three nurserymaids and two gardeners their only companions at this time on the terrace. Carriages rolled along the quay at their feet, footsteps sounded on the sidewalk against the wall that supported the promenade. Hardly as yet knowing what to say to each other, they surveyed that beautiful part of Paris that stretches from l'Ile St. Louis and the towers of Notre Dame to the slopes of Meudon. She repeated:

"It's very pretty, all the same."

Then, all at once struck by the recollection of their trip to the sky at Mont St. Michel, he cried:

"Do you remember our climb up the Chemin des Fous?"

"Yes, indeed! Do you know I feel a little frightened when I think of it now! I don't believe

I could do it now. I was intoxicated with the air, the sun, and the sea. But—look around; there is beauty to be seen here, too. I am very fond of Paris."

He was surprised and felt a confused presentiment that something existing in her at Mont St. Michel was missing now. He murmured:

"What does the place matter, so long as you are with me!"

Without answering she pressed his hand. More overjoyed at this silent caress than he would have been, perhaps, by a tender word, he now felt his heart relieved of the embarrassment that had tied his tongue, and he spoke. He told her slowly and with solemnity that his life was at her disposal for her to do with it as she thought fit.

Pleased, but at the same time a true daughter of the times, ever a prey to skepticism and to a tendency to irony, she smiled and answered:

"Oh, pray do not give yourself away so completely as all that!"

He turned fully toward her, and, looking her straight in the eyes, repeated, with that earnest look that is almost like a touch, what he had just said, only at greater length, more ardently, more poetically. All that he had written in previous letters he now repeated to her, with such fervor and conviction that she sat by, listening as if in a cloud of incense. She felt herself caressed in every womanly fiber by those adoring lips, as she had never been before in all her life of adulation. When he ended, she answered simply:

"And I—I love you well, also."

They were holding each other's hands just like the boys and girls one sees wandering in country

lanes, and watched with dreamy eyes the steamboats gliding along the river. There they sat, alone in Paris, in the confused hum of movement that floated around them, more alone in the very center of that city pulsing with life and action than they had been during the moments they spent together in the territory of the sea-gulls at the top of the Chemin des Fous; and for several seconds they completely forgot that any other beings besides themselves existed on the earth. It was she who first returned to a sense of external things, and realized that time was passing.

"Shall we meet again here to-morrow?" she asked.

He pondered for some minutes, embarrassed as to how to express what he wished to say:

"Yes—yes—certainly. But—can we not see each other somewhere else? Of course this spot is secluded—but still every one else has a right to come to it."

"That's true," she answered hesitatingly. "However, it is imperative also that you should not be seen by any of our friends for at least a fortnight, so that your story of the expedition will be believed. How mysterious and romantic it will be! We shall meet, and no one in Paris besides our two selves will know that you are in the city! But are there not other means—other places to go?" come to my house, so I don't quite see——"

He flushed and interrupted:

"I can't, either, ask you to come to my house. But are there not other means—other places?"

She exhibited neither surprise nor anger, being a practical-minded woman, devoid of false modesty.

"Why, yes," she replied. "But, of course, it takes time, and we must think——"

"I have thought——"

"Already?"

"Yes, already. Do you know the Rue des Vieux Champs at Auteuil?"

"No."

"It is between the Rue Tournemine and the Rue Jean-de-Saulge. In that little street there is a garden, in that garden a cottage, having exits by each of the streets that I have mentioned."

"What then?"

"That cottage awaits your presence."

She thought intently for a moment, then, quite without embarrassment, she asked two or three questions dictated by feminine prudence. He answered them to her satisfaction evidently, for, as she rose to go, she murmured:

"Very well—I'll come to-morrow."

"At what time?"

"Three o'clock."

"I shall be waiting at Number Seven. Do not forget." They were now standing. "Do not accompany me," she said. "Stay here for about ten minutes, and then go away by the quay. Adieu!"

She left quickly, with the discreet, modest, hurried demeanor of one of those good, industrious girls that one sees hastening through the streets to their daily scene of honorable toil. Mariolle took a fiacre and drove to Auteuil, fearing lest the cottage should not be ready in time. He found it full of workmen, the sound of the tapping of hammers resounding throughout it. The walls were hung with tapestries, and the floors covered with

carpets; everything had been cleaned and put in order. The garden, which was the remnant of an ancient park, containing some fine old trees and one or two summerhouses, was being beautified by a florist. He had already planted rosebushes, pinks, geraniums, mignonette, and hosts of other flowers, whose development can be hastened or retarded so as to transform in a day an uncultivated field into a gorgeous flower-bed.

Mariolle was as delighted as if he had just scored some signal triumph, and, having made the upholsterer swear solemnly that all the furniture would be in its place in the rooms before noon the next day, he went off to buy divers bibelots in order that the interior should be as gorgeous as the garden. He chose photographs of celebrated pictures to hang on the walls, and for the mantels and tables Deck porcelain and other knickknacks dear to women. In the course of that afternoon he squandered two months' income and squandered it with delight, remembering that for ten years he had practiced continued economy, not because he wished to save, but simply because he did not feel impelled to spend: in consequence he was able now to be prodigal.

Next morning he returned to the cottage, superintended the placing of the furniture on its arrival, hung the pictures himself, and, mounted on a step-ladder, vaporized all the hangings with perfumes, then burned perfumes in the rooms and sprinkled them over the carpets. In his fever of love, his rapture, he wanted to make this the most delicious, the most perfect affair he had ever attempted. Every little while he glanced at the clock, calculating how many hours, how many minutes were to

elapse before her arrival, and he hurried the workmen and worried himself over the placing of the different pieces of furniture and ornaments.

Moved by prudence, he dismissed all the workers before two o'clock, and then, during the slow last revolution of the minute hand around the dial of the clock in the silence of the house where he was awaiting the greatest happiness that the world held for him, he tasted, alone with his dream, going up and down through the rooms, speaking aloud, imagining, giving rein to his passion-kindled fancy, the most frenzied enjoyment of love he was ever to know.

Then he went out into the garden. The rays of the sun fell on the grass through the trees, lighting up most exquisitely a basket of roses in particular. Heaven itself was smiling on the rendezvous. He went now and stood close to the front door, opening it frequently, fearing that she might mistake the number.

Three o'clock rang out and was immediately echoed by the clocks of ten convents and manufactories in the vicinity. He stood now, watch in hand, and was astonished when two light taps sounded on the wood of the door just outside his ear, for he had heard no noise of footsteps along the street.

He opened the door; it was she. She looked surprised at his prompt appearance, then glanced around apprehensively at the neighboring houses and felt reassured, for she certainly knew no one among the modest *bourgeois* who would inhabit dwellings of this character; then she examined the garden with curiosity that changed into approval; finally she placed the backs of her two hands just

ungloved on the mouth of her friend, then took his arm and entered the garden. She repeated at every step:

"*Dieu!* how lovely! How perfectly unexpected and lovely!" Noticing the basket of roses bathed in sunlight, she cried: "This seems like fairy-land!"

She plucked a rose, kissed it, and put it in her corsage. They went into the cottage, and she seemed so pleased that he felt moved to kneel at her feet, although at the bottom of his heart there was, perhaps, a feeling that she might have shown a little less interest in the rendezvous and more in him. She looked all about her, excited and pleased like a little girl who finds and handles a new toy; feeling no atom of shame or regret in this, the grave of her womanly honor, she appreciated its costly elegance with the satisfaction of a connoisseur who sees evidence that his taste has been complimented. On her way hither she had been haunted by a fear of encountering a commonplace house with stuffy, faded hangings, soiled by previous rendezvous. But everything here was new, unexpected, dainty, and had been arranged expressly for her: it must have cost Mariolle a pretty penny. He was certainly perfect, this man. Turning toward him, she raised her two arms with a ravishing gesture of appeal, and they clasped each other in one of those embraces that give the strange double sensation of bliss and unconsciousness.

In the impenetrable silence of this retreat they spent three hours of delight, which to André Mariolle were hours filled with the rapture of the body united with the rapture of the soul. Before parting they went around the garden and sat down in one

of the summerhouses where they were invisible to outsiders. André, full of exuberance, spoke to her as if she were an idol who for his sake had just stepped down from a pedestal, and she listened languorously as he had seen her do at the end of long visits from people who had bored her. But she remained affectionate, all the same, her face irradiated by a smile that was tender, though a little constrained, and, holding his hand, she pressed it with a continuous pressure more unreflecting, perhaps, than eloquent.

She could not have been listening to what he was saying, for she broke in, in the midst of a sentence, to say:

"I must certainly go. I am due at the Marquise of Bratiane's at six: I shall be very late."

He went with her to the door which he had opened for her at her entrance. They embraced; then, with a furtive glance up and down the street, she hastened off.

Twenty days passed: days so sweet, so full of the light of happiness! It seemed to him that they could never end, that they would go on forever like this, lost to all else, he living for her alone; in his mind, the unbalanced mind of an artist who has produced nothing, always tormented by expectation, arose an impossible dream of a discreet, quiet life of clandestine happiness. She came every three days, without resistance, attracted, it would seem, as much by the amusement she found in the assignation, by the charm of the little cottage now a hotbed of rare flowers, and by the novelty of this life of love, scarcely a dangerous one, since no one had any right to molest her in it, but full of mystery, nevertheless, as by the intense and ever-in-

creasing infatuation of her lover. Then one day she said:

"Now, my dear, you must reappear in the world. You must come and spend the afternoon with me at my house to-morrow."

"Why must I reappear so soon?" he cried in dismay.

"Because if it were to leak out that you are back, the situation would give rise to suspicions."

He saw that she was right and promised to go to her house the next day. Then he asked:

"You are receiving to-morrow?"

"Yes," she replied. "A solemn little rite is to take place at my house to-morrow."

This news was unwelcome to André.

"What sort of rite?" he asked.

Madame de Burne laughed softly. "I have persuaded Massival, by dint of outrageous flattery, to produce *Didon* at my house—*Didon,* his new work which has not yet appeared. It is a poem of antique love. Madame de Bratiane, who thought herself the sole proprietor of Massival, is exasperated. She also will be at my house, because she sings."

"Are many coming?"

"No, only a few intimate friends; you know them almost all."

"Can't I get out of going to this? I am so happy in my solitude."

"Oh, no, my friend! You know I care more for you than for all the rest put together."

His heart began to beat furiously. "Thank you," said he, "I shall be there."

CHAPTER VI

AN UNPLEASANT SURPRISE

"BONJOUR, *cher Monsieur.*"

Mariolle could not help remarking that it was no longer "*cher ami*" as at Auteuil, and the handclasp was brief, the greeting of a woman whose mind was preoccupied, taken up entirely with society interests. He went on into the salon. Madame de Burne advanced toward the lovely Madame Le Prieur, whose extreme decolletage and sculpturesque pretensions had earned for her the pseudonym of "the Goddess." She was married to a member of the Institute, of the Department of Inscriptions and Belles-Lettres.

"Ah! Mariolle," cried Lamarthe. "Where did you spring from? We all thought you were dead!"

"I'm just back from a trip to Finistère." He went on to describe his imaginary tour, but the novelist interrupted him:

"Do you know the Baronne de Frémines?"

"No: only by sight, but I have heard a great deal about her. She's very peculiar, is she not?"

"The queen of madcaps, but with a tang of modernity that is simply delicious. Come and let me present you."

Taking him by the arm, she led him toward a young woman whom every one likened to a doll—a pale and exquisite little fair doll, invented and created by the devil himself expressly to bring about the damnation of big, bearded children. She had long, narrow eyes, cut a little obliquely, *à la Chinoise;* flashes of blue enamel were visible through the eyelids—eyelids that very rarely opened wide, and, when they did, dropped again almost instantly, to veil the mystery that seemed to enshroud her. Her fair, silky hair shone with silvery reflections, and her delicate, thin-lipped mouth seemed designed by a miniaturist and chiseled by a sculptor. The voice that issued from it had crystalline vibrations; and the ideas, unexpected, sarcastic, original, mischievous, the cold destructive seduction, the complex tranquillity of this neurotic little being inspired those under her influence with stormy and violent passions. She was known to all Paris as the most extravagant *mondaine* of society, also the wittiest, but no one really knew what she was, what she thought, what she did. Men in general were irresistibly captivated by her. Her husband was as insoluble an enigma as herself. Affable and lavish, he appeared to see nothing of what went on around him. Was he blind, or was he indifferent or simply good-natured? Perhaps, indeed, there was nothing to see except eccentricities which, no doubt, he also found amusing as well as the rest. But there were sinister

rumors afloat in regard to him; some went so far as to say that he profited by his wife's dishonor.

Between Madame de Burne and the Baronne was attraction and fierce jealousy; periods of intimacy, followed by crises of hostility.

They would be friendly, then quarrel, then seek each other again like professional duelists who appreciate each other's skill and wish for a combat to the death. Just about this time the Baronne was triumphing: she had scored a victory, a signal victory; Lamarthe had succumbed to her charms: she had snatched him from her rival and enlisted him among the titled captives of her bow and spear. The novelist was *épris*—puzzled, charmed, and stupefied by all that he had discovered in this sphinx, and he could do nothing but descant upon her charms to every one—a state of mind that had already given rise to no little gossip.

At the moment he was introducing Mariolle to Madame de Frémines, Madame de Burne shot a glance from the end of the salon. Smiling, he murmured to his friend:

"Look at the sovereign of these parts; she seems displeased."

André looked, but Madame de Burne turned to greet Massival, just appearing on the threshold. He was immediately followed by the Marquise de Bratiane, which caused Lamarthe to observe:

"Aha! we're going to have a second rendering of *Didon;* the first has just been enacted in the coupé of the Marquise."

Madame de Frémines added:

"The collection of our friend De Burne is certainly losing its choicest jewels."

A rage against, a sort of hatred toward this woman took possession of Mariolle; also an irritation against society in general, against the life led by these people, their ideas, their tastes, their futile aims, their puerile amusements. And so, profiting by the fact that Lamarthe had bent over to whisper to the Baronne, he turned on his heel and went away.

The handsome Madame Le Prieur was standing alone a few paces away from him. He went to speak to her. According to Lamarthe, this woman represented the old type of femininity in this up-to-date clique. Young, tall, pretty, with very regular features and chestnut hair exhibiting gleams of red, her tranquil and benign charm, her calm and skillful coquetry, her great desire to please disguised under an appearance of simple and sincere affection, had won her strong partisans, whom she was very careful to guard from the power of dangerous rivals. Her house was said to be the resort of a few intimates, who unanimously sang the praises of her husband. She and Mariolle began to chat: she had a sincere admiration for this quiet, intelligent man who was so little spoken of and who was, perhaps, equal in intellect to the others.

Now the last guests began to come in. The portly Fresnel, out of breath, wiping with a last flourish of his handkerchief his perpetually moist and shiny forehead; Georges de Maltry, the modern philosopher; then, together, the Baron de Gravil and the Comte de Marantin. Monsieur de Pradon was assisting his daughter to receive. He was particularly polite to Mariolle, but the latter with a heavy heart watched Madame de Burne come and go, here and there, lavishing her attentions on everybody

but himself, it seemed. Twice, it is true, she had flashed him from a distance a rapid glance that seemed to say: "I am thinking of you," but the impression was so fleeting that he was not perfectly sure that he was not mistaken. Then, besides, he could not help seeing that the ostentatious court that Lamarthe was paying Madame de Frémines irritated Madame de Burne.

"It is only pique," he said to himself, "the annoyance of a collector from whom a rare bibelot has been stolen." But he suffered, notwithstanding, and all the more because he saw that she watched them incessantly in a furtive manner and that the sight of Madame Le Prieur and himself thus chatting together did not appear to cause her the slightest uneasiness. This was because she was sure of him, while Lamarthe was escaping from her toils. Therefore, what was this love of theirs to her—this love born yesterday, which had obliterated all other impressions from his mind?

M. de Pradon now asked for silence, and Massival opened the piano which Madame de Bratiane was approaching, taking off her gloves, for she was to voice the transports of *Didon,* when the door opened again and a young man appeared who attracted all eyes. He was tall and slight, with short, curly, fair hair and a most aristocratic appearance. Even Madame Le Prieur seemed impressed.

"Who is this?" asked Mariolle of her.

"Why, don't you know him? Comte Rodolphe de Bernhaus."

"Ah! the one who fought Sigismund Fabre?"

"Yes."

This event had caused a great stir. The Comte de Bernhaus, of the Austrian Embassy, a diplomat

with an illustrious future awaiting him, an elegant Bismarck, it was said, having heard at an official reception a scurrilous allusion to his sovereign, challenged the one who had made it, a celebrated fencer, and killed him in the duel. After this combat, the renown of the Count equaled that of Sarah Bernhardt, with this difference, that the name of the young diplomat was surrounded by a halo of poetic chivalry. In addition to this, he was charming socially, an agreeable conversationalist, and thoroughly *distingué*.

He sat down by Madame de Burne with a gallant air, and Massival took his place at the keyboard, up and down which his fingers roamed for some instants. Almost all the guests changed their seats, drawing close together so as to hear well and also command a good view of the singer. Lamarthe and Mariolle found themselves again shoulder to shoulder.

There was a profound silence full of expectation, attention, and respect; then the musician began by a slow, a very slow succession of notes which seemed like a musical recital. There were pauses, light repetitions, a series of little phrases, at times languorous, at times nervous, even uneasy, but full of originality, it seemed to Mariolle. He could see a woman, the Queen of Carthage, in all the plenitude of her youth and beauty, walking slowly on the seashore. He understood that she suffered, there was upon her soul the burden of a great misfortune: and he looked closely at Madame de Bratiane. Motionless and pale, with her inky hair that looked as if it had been steeped in the Italian night, with her eyes looking straight in front of her, she stood waiting. There was in her strong, somewhat hard

face, marked with eyes and eyebrows so dark that they looked like black stains, in all her swarthy, powerful, and passionate countenance, something that thrilled the audience, a menace of a coming tempest, such as one descries in lowering skies. Swinging his head with its long hair, Massival continued the story of poignant sorrow that he was relating on the ivory keys.

Suddenly a tremor seemed to convulse the frame of the singer; she opened her mouth and uttered a long and piercing wail of anguish. Not one of those shrieks of tragic despair that singers emit on the theatrical stage with dramatic gestures, neither was it one of those screams of love betrayed that bring down the house with applause, but an indescribable cry, a cry of the flesh and not of the soul, like the howl of a mangled brute, the cry of animal femininity deceived and forsaken. Then she grew silent and Massival again took up more vibrantly, more feelingly, the history of that wretched queen abandoned by the man she loved.

Once more the voice of the woman arose. She spoke now—spoke of the intolerable torture of loneliness, of her unappeasable craving for vanished caresses, and the agony of knowing that he is gone forever. Her liquid and thrilling voice made every heart in that audience quiver. She seemed to suffer all that she described: to love, or, at least, to be capable of loving with a furious ardor, that swarthy Italian with her ebon hair. When she finished her eyes were swimming in tears, and she wiped them away slowly. Lamarthe, bending toward Mariolle, quivering with the excited sensibility of an artist, said:

"*Dieu!* How grand she is at this moment,

mon cher: that is a woman—and the only one here!"

Then, after a short pause, he added philosophically:

"But who knows? It may all be just a mirage due to music. After all, nothing exists except illusion. But what an art—to be able to evoke illusion, that or any other form of illusion!"

Then there came an intermission between the first and second parts, and the composer and his interpreter were warmly congratulated. Lamarthe, especially, was very lavish with his compliments, and he was thoroughly sincere, as a man particularly able to feel and comprehend, and one keenly susceptible to beauty expressed in each and every form. The way in which he described to Madame de Bratiane what he had felt in listening to her was so flattering that she flushed with pleasure, and the other women who were looking on conceived some spite thereat: very likely he was not unaware of the envy he was awakening in their breasts.

When he returned to his place he perceived the Comte Rodolphe de Bernhaus sitting by Madame de Frémines. She looked as if she had begun at once confiding some secret to him, and they were smiling at each other as if enchanted with their conversation. Mariolle, more and more gloomy, was standing near a door; the novelist joined him. The portly Fresnel, Georges de Maltry, the Baron de Gravil, and the Comte de Marantin were all standing near Madame de Burne, who was dispensing tea. She seemed encircled by a crown of worshipers. Lamarthe remarked this sarcastically to his friend, adding:

"But a crown that has lost a jewel, and I would wager that she would gladly give all the diamonds of the Rhine to recover the missing gem!"

"Whom do you mean?" asked Mariolle.

"Why, Bernhaus, the handsome, the irresistible, the incomprehensible, he for whom this fête was given, for whose sake was worked this miracle of getting Massival to induce his Florentine Dido to sing here."

André, although incredulous, felt a pang shoot through his heart.

"Has she known him long?" he asked.

"Oh, no! ten days at the most. But she has made herculean effort during those days, and shown herself a masterly tactician. If you had been here you would have laughed."

"Indeed! Why?"

"She met him the first time at Madame de Frémines'. I was dining there that night. Bernhaus is very intimate there, as you may see—just look at him! Our beautiful friend, De Burne, at once started to work to conquer the redoubtable Austrian. She succeeded and she will continue to succeed, although the little Frémines is infinitely superior to her in impudence, in genuine indifference, and, perhaps, in perversity. Our friend, De Burne, is more skilful in coquetry, more womanly—I mean by that more modern-womanly, that is to say, irresistible by that artificial power of fascination which is, to-day, more effective than natural power to charm. It is not, accurately speaking, artificial, either; but æsthetic, the profound feeling for the æsthetic inherent in women. It is in this that her power consists. She knows her own powers thoroughly, because she pleases herself more

than any one else, and she is never mistaken in the proper way in which to conquer a man."

"I think you are exaggerating," protested Mariolle. "To me she has always seemed very simple and natural."

"That is because simplicity and naturalness are the best bait to use to attract you. However, I don't wish to speak against her: I find her superior to almost all her associates. But, all the same, they are not women."

Some chords now struck by Massival called for silence; Madame de Bratiane sang the second part of *Didon*. She was a superb Dido in her interpretation of physical passion and sensual despair. But Lamarthe never removed his eyes from the *tête-à-tête* of Madame de Frémines and Comte de Bernhaus. As soon as the last chords of the piano were lost in the applause of the audience, he continued in an annoyed tone as if he were arguing with an adversary:

"No, they are not women. Even the best among them are conscienceless jades. The more I see of them the less I experience that sensation of sweet intoxication which a true woman should awaken in a man. They do intoxicate us, it is true, but in exciting our nerves, for they are drugs! Oh, yes! —the taste is very nice—but the wine is not the real

wine of other days. You see, my friend, women are created and put upon the earth for two things only —two things which alone can develop her true, her grand and excellent qualities—love and children. I am speaking like a Prudhomme. Now, these women of to-day are incapable of loving, and they don't wish to have children: when they do unfortunately become mothers, they regard it as a misfortune, a burden. The fact is, they are monsters!"

Astounded at the violent expressions of the author, and at the fire flashing from his eyes, Mariolle asked:

"Then why do you pass half your time tied to their apron strings?"

"Why? Why?" answered Lamarthe impetuously. "Because they interest me. And, besides, would you forbid a doctor to walk the hospitals? These women are my clinic!"

This argument calmed him. He went on:

"And then I like them because they so thoroughly reflect this era. At bottom I am scarcely more of a man than they are women. As soon as I begin to be attracted by one of them I cast about to discover what qualities she has that will repel me: in this way I am able to detach myself, just as a doctor takes poison so as to test an antidote. So I never get seriously entangled. I play the game just as well as any of them—perhaps better, and it helps me by supplying material for my books; while they derive no benefit whatever from it. How silly they are! What do they become in the end? Failures, nothing but failures, embittered by the lessening of their powers to attract as age creeps on."

Listening to him, Mariolle seemed to feel him-

self a prey to depression—a depression like that felt after a long succession of dark, rainy days. He knew perfectly well that the man of letters was not far wrong in his premises, but he could not admit that he was entirely correct. So, with some irritation, he argued with him not so much to defend women as to make contemporary literature responsible for their apparent decadence.

" In the era when novelists and poets set forth exalted and idealistic work," said he, " work calculated to stimulate the imagination, women sought and believed they found in life the reflection of that which they had found in fiction and poetry. To-day you persist in suppressing all poetical and romantic portrayal, and create only works setting forth disillusionizing realism. Now, my dear fellow, love being dead in fiction is the cause of its death in our midst. You were the inventors of the ideal, and they believed in your inventions; at present you are the creators of realism, and, following in your wake, they have begun to believe in the vulgarity of everything."

Lamarthe, who greatly enjoyed literary talk, was beginning a dissertation when Madame de Burne came up. She was decidedly in one of her best days, dressed to delight the eye, and wearing a challenging and assertive air that the consciousness of a struggle always gave her. She seated herself.

" This is what I like—to surprise two men who are talking and not talking for me," she said. " What are you discussing? "

Without embarrassment and in a tone of gallant raillery, Lamarthe revealed to her the question at issue. Then he resumed the argument with the added fervor due to her presence. She became

interested at once in the subject and took up the cudgels for the modern woman with much wit and cleverness. She interpolated remarks, incomprehensible to the novelist, on the fidelity and attachment of which the most flirtatious could be capable, and Mariolle's heart beat high. When she had left them to sit by Madame de Frémines, who had persistently detained the Count, Lamarthe and Mariolle, charmed by her feminine cleverness and grace, declared to each other that she was incontestably an exquisite woman.

"Now, look at her!" exclaimed the novelist.

It was the great passage at arms. What were they talking of now, the Count and the two women? Madame de Burne had come at the psychological moment, when the *tête-à-tête,* too prolonged even for people who were *épris,* was becoming wearisome; and she broke in with an indignant air, repeating what she had heard Lamarthe say. It was very applicable to Madame de Frémines; moreover, it had just been uttered by her most recent victim: the Comte de Bernhaus was an exceptionally quick-witted man, who would immediately grasp the whole matter. At once the argument grew animated. Then the hostess called Lamarthe and Mariolle over to take part; and the discussion waxing warmer, she insisted on everybody joining in.

So a lively war of words ensued, every one contributing his or her convictions. Madame de Burne, allowing a perhaps slightly insincere touch of sentiment to soften her bright sayings, contrived to be the wittiest and most brilliant of all, for this was most indisputably a day of success for her, when she appeared cleverer, livelier, and prettier than ever before.

CHAPTER VII

CAPRICES

AS soon as André Mariolle had left Madame de Burne the incisive charm of her presence vanished: he felt within and around himself, in his flesh, his soul, in the air, in the entire world, a sort of disappearance of that happiness in living that had recently animated and sustained him.

What had happened? Nothing—almost nothing. She had been charming to him at the end of that reception, telling him in one or two eloquent glances: "For me, you are the only person here." And yet he felt that he had made discoveries in regard to her that he would have liked to ignore. They amounted to nothing, that is, almost nothing; and still he felt stunned, like a man who has surprised his mother or his father in a doubtful action, when he learned that during these twenty days, the twenty days which he had believed given up, devoted entirely by her as they had been by him, minute by minute, to the new and intense enjoyment of their love, she had

resumed the tenor of her former existence: made many calls, plans, projects, recommenced those delectable struggles for supremacy with her rivals, pursued men, received adulation with delight, and displayed all her allurements to others besides himself. Already; she had done all this already!

If it had been later, he would not have minded so much. He knew the world, the ways of women of society, their sentiments, their habits; he was too intelligent to have been exacting or unduly anxious. She was beautiful, made to please, to receive homage and listen to compliments. From among all her admirers she had chosen him, boldly, royally. He would have remained, he still remained all the same, the grateful slave of her caprices, and the resigned spectator of her life as a brilliant woman. But he suffered within—in that dark cavern in the innermost recesses of the soul where our keenest susceptibilities lie hidden. He was wrong: he always had been at fault in this manner ever since he could remember. He was too highly strung for comfort in his relations with other people; his soul was too thin-skinned. This was why he had always led so isolated a life; he dreaded contact and consequent jarring. In that it was he that was wrong, not others, for this dread of being jarred proceeds from a man's incapability of making allowances; from his being unable to endure in his fellows qualities not existing in himself. However, he could not alter the pitch to which his sensibilities were keyed.

Certainly he had no cause to reproach Madame de Burne. If she had insisted on his keeping away from her salon and remaining hidden during all those days, it was in order to prevent suspicion, to

elude surveillance, to be more safely his in the future. Then why this pain gnawing at his heart? Ah, why, indeed? Because he had thought her entirely his, and now he had discovered that he never could seize and hold as his own the great surface of her entity: that belonged to everybody.

He knew also, none better, that life is made up of imperfections and insufficiencies; up to now he had been resigned to this, hiding his discontent under a veil of distant reserve. But this time he had hoped that he would attain that which he had ceaselessly but vainly expected; that he would possess the woman he loved in her entirety: but to possess anything in its entirety is not given to any one on this earth. His evening was a melancholy one, but he tried to console himself by finding reasons to account for the painful impression he had carried away. When he was in bed, this impression, instead of diminishing, deepened, and, as he never allowed any impulse of his soul to remain unanalyzed, he began to look for the source of this new uneasiness. It came, went away, and came again, like little gusts of icy wind, awakening in his being a suffering, as yet indefinite and vague, but as dispiriting in its effect as those twinges of neuralgia brought on by a sudden draught of cold air—twinges that foretell a coming siege of anguish.

Above all, he knew that he was jealous—jealous not only as a passionate lover, but as a man in possession of the object of his desire. As long as he had not seen her surrounded by other men, this sensation had remained dormant, although he had felt aware of its existence and had foreseen its awakening; but he had expected the awakening to be alto-

gether different. When he found that that mistress whom he had imagined wrapped up in him during those days of secret and frequent meetings, that period of first raptures that should have been consecrated to isolation and ardent sensation—when he discovered her, on his return to social life after that notable epoch in their existence, more carried away then ever by her futile coquetries, by that lavish bestowal of her personality that could leave but little for the one she preferred above all, then he felt himself possessed by a jealousy more of the body than of the soul, not vague and hovering like a fever that is still latent, but definite and precise, for he doubted her.

He doubted her instinctively, with an impulse of distrust that was tingling in his veins even more than influencing his thoughts; the almost physical discomfort of a man who is not sure of the fidelity of his consort. Then the doubt began to crystallize into suspicion.

After all, what was he to her? Her first lover or her tenth? The direct successor to M. de Burne, the husband, or the successor to Lamarthe, Massival, and Georges de Maltry and the predecessor, perhaps, of the Comte de Bernhaus? What did he know of her? That she was radiantly pretty, surpassingly *chic,* intelligent, bright, and witty, but fickle, easily turned aside, wearied or disgusted; in love with her self far more than with anything or anybody else, and an insatiable coquette. Had she had a lover, or lovers, before him? If she had not, would she have given herself up to him with such callousness? or have entered his room so audaciously that night at the hotel? Or would she have agreed so readily to the rendezvous at Auteuil?

Before consenting to go there she had simply asked a few questions, the questions that would occur to a prudent and experienced woman. He had answered circumspectly, like a man accustomed to such adventures, and she had said "yes," completely reassured, knowing it was all right from knowledge gained at earlier rendezvous.

He recalled how she had rapped with discreet authoritativeness at that little door behind which he stood with wildly beating heart; how she had entered without any perceptible emotion, only exhibiting anxiety as to whether she were likely to be recognized by those living in the neighboring houses; how she had seemed immediately at home in that house leased and furnished purposely for their assignations. No woman, it seemed to him, however bold, superior to moral conventions, disdainful of prejudice, could have been so thoroughly unmoved at a first rendezvous. Mental worry, physical hesitation, the instinctive dread of new paths, would she not have experienced all these had she not been a little practiced in this kind of excursion and if custom had not worn the bloom from her natural modesty?

Flushed by that irritating, intolerable fever that the agitation of the soul evokes in the heat of the sleepless couch, Mariolle tossed and turned, carried away by one dominating idea, like a man who images he is slipping down a precipice. He tried to arrest the course and break the thread of his thoughts; he tried to call up reassuring ideas and common-sense arguments, but the germ of fear was there, and he could not prevent its leavening his imagination.

Still, what had he to reproach her with? Noth-

ing more than being different from himself, not comprehending life as he did, and not having the same degree of sensibility that characterized him.

As soon as he awoke next morning, the desire to see her again, to fortify by her presence his confidence in her, came upon him like hunger, and he awaited the suitable moment to make her his first official visit. When she saw him enter her little drawing-room, where, seated alone, she was writing letters, she came toward him with outstretched hands.

"Ah! good day, *cher ami!*" she cried, with so bright and sincere an expression of joy that all the odious thoughts whose shadows still darkened his being took flight at the sight. He sat down near her and began to speak at once of the manner in which he loved her: for now they were not in the same position in regard to each other as before. In tender words he made her understand that there exist on the face of the earth two kinds of lovers: those who desire like madmen and on the morrow of their triumph grow cool, and those whose chains possession only rivets closer; in whom sensual love, intermingled with the immaterial, inexpressible appeal that the heart of such a man sends out to the woman he desires, brings about complete and torturing subjugation. Torturing? Yes, it is always torturing, no matter how happy the lover may be, for nothing, not even in the most intimate moments, ever completely slakes the thirst for Her that men carry in their hearts.

Madame de Burne listened, charmed, grateful, delighted. She grew excited listening to him, just as one grows excited at a theater watching an actor play his part with consummate skill, so that the

rôle awakens an echo in one's own life. An echo was, in fact, awakened in her; and the echo was that of a sincere passion: but the passion did not exist in her heart. However, she felt glad to have evoked that sentiment, glad, too, that she had evoked it in a man capable of so exquisitely expressing it; a man who pleased her thoroughly, and to whom she was truly attached, of whom she felt the need more and more, not physically, but to gratify her mysterious, feminine personality, eager for tenderness, homage, and conquest—so glad that she wished to embrace him, to tender him her lips, everything, so that he might continue to adore her.

She answered him artlessly and without prudery, with the tactful skill peculiar to some women, indicating to him that he also had made great progress in her heart. And in the salon, where by chance that day no one came to disturb them till twilight, they remained *tête-à-tête* together, dwelling on the same topic, caressing each other with words which did not carry the same meaning to their two souls. Lamps had just been brought when Madame de Bratiane appeared. Mariolle rose to leave. As Madame de Burne accompanied him into the first salon, he asked her:

"When shall I meet you there?"

"Shall we say Friday?"

"Yes. What time?"

"The same—three o'clock."

"Till Friday, then, adieu. I adore you."

During the two days of expectation that separated him from this meeting, he discovered, he experienced, the sensation of loneliness as he had never experienced it before. He needed the presence of a woman, and nothing but this imperative

need existed on earth for him: and as this woman was quite near to him, and nothing but social conventions prevented him from going to her at any moment, he grew exasperated in his solitude, at the slow passing of time, at the utter impossibility of performing an action thoroughly feasible.

He arrived at the rendezvous three hours too soon; but waiting there where she would come pleased him and soothed his nerves, after having suffered so long in awaiting her mentally in places where she did not come.

Installing himself near the door long before the clock struck, he began to tremble with impatience as soon as the hour rang out. He waited on, and then the quarter-past sounded out. He looked up and down the little street cautiously, but it was empty from end to end.

The minutes crawled by with torturing slowness: he drew out his watch continually, and, when the hand arrived at the half-past, he felt in his soul the impression of having been standing in that spot an incalculable time. Then he heard a light foot on the pavement, and the little taps given by a gloved hand on the door made him forget his anguish and overflow with gratitude toward her.

A little out of breath, she asked:

"Am I very late?"

"No, not very."

"Just imagine, I had hard work to get away at all. My house was full of people, and I scarcely knew how to get rid of them. Tell me, are you here under your real name?"

"No. Why do you ask?"

"So that I may be able to send you a dispatch if I am prevented from coming."

"I am supposed to be Monsieur Nicolle."

"All right. I shan't forget. *Dieu!* how lovely it is in this garden!"

The flowers, coaxed, renewed, multiplied by the gardener, who found that he had to do with a customer who paid liberally and never haggled, stretched all along the garden in five great, variegated, odorous stripes. Stopping in front of a bench near a basket of heliotrope:

"Let us sit here," she said. "I have a funny story to tell you."

Then she related him a piece of gossip so fresh that she was still quite excited over it. It seemed that Madame Massival, the former mistress of the artist, whom he had married, exasperated with jealousy, had gone to Madame de Bratiane's house in the midst of a soirée, when the singer was singing, accompanied by the composer. There she had made a frightful scene, to the fury of the Italian and the surprise and joy of the guests. Massival, almost crazy, tried to get her away, but his wife slapped his face, pulled out handfuls of his hair and beard, bit him and tore his clothes. He was helpless in her clutches, but Lamarthe and two servants came to his rescue and managed to get him away from the claws and teeth of the infuriated woman.

Calm was only restored, however, after the departure of the married pair. Ever since the musician had been invisible, while the novelist went about relating his experience in a most witty and amusing manner.

Madame de Burne was upset about it, so much so that she could talk of nothing else. The names of Massival and Lamarthe returning constantly to her lips irritated Mariolle.

"You have just heard this?" he asked.

"Yes, of course—about an hour ago—scarcely an hour."

He thought bitterly: "And this is what made her late!"

Then he asked: "Shall we go in?"

Absent-minded and docile, she replied: "Oh, certainly."

When an hour later she had left him, for she said she was in a hurry, he went back alone into the little, solitary house and sat down in a low chair in their room. The impression of having no more possessed this woman than if she had not come at all seemed to create a black hole in his soul, his being, into whose depths he gazed. He saw nothing; he understood nothing; he seemed to comprehend nothing any more. If she had not eluded his kisses, she had at any rate eluded the embrace of his tenderness, by a mysterious unwillingness to belong to him. She had not refused to come; she had not stayed away. But it appeared to him that her heart had not come there with her: it had stayed away far off, roaming about, amused by trifles. He now perceived clearly that already he loved her with his senses as much as with his soul; perhaps more. The disappointment of his futile caresses inspired him with a frenzied desire to rush after her and fetch her back. But what would be the use, since her fickle mind was set on other matters that day? He would have to wait for the whim of love to come to his changeable mistress just as other caprices did. He went home slowly, very tired, with heavy steps, his eyes fixed on the pavement. And he remembered that they had made no rendezvous for the future.

CHAPTER VIII

THE LIGHT THAT LIES IN WOMAN'S EYES

SHE remained until the beginning of the winter faithful to their tryst—faithful but not prompt. During the first three months she came often late—generally from three-quarters of an hour to two hours after the time assigned. As the autumn rains often forced Mariolle to wait under his umbrella behind the garden door, shivering, his feet in the mud, he had a sort of little kiosk built of wood with a porch, behind the garden gate, so as not to risk a wetting at each of these rendezvous. The trees were bare now, and the roses and other summer flowers were replaced by great masses of white, pink, violet, purple, and yellow chrysanthemums, emitting a slightly acrid and balsamic odor that conveyed a sort of

triste suggestion of time passing. In front of the cottage some rare flowers, forced by the floriculturist's art, formed a great Maltese cross with their delicate shades. Mariolle never could pass this design with its new and lovely varieties without having a pain at the heart, called there by the thought that this cross seemed to indicate a tomb. Many a long hour he passed in the little kiosk behind the garden door. The rain would patter on the roof, then run along its edge and drip down; and at every vigil in the chapel consecrated to Expectation he would go over the same arguments, call up the same hopes, anxieties, and discouraging thoughts. For it was one continued struggle, an unforeseen, incessant struggle, desperate, exhausting, a struggle with something which perhaps did not exist—the love of this woman.

How bizarre their meetings were! Sometimes she would arrive laughing, full of gossip, and would sit down without taking off her hat or veil or even kissing him. She did not often remember to kiss him nowadays; her head was full of interesting preoccupations, far more delightful than the wish to offer her lips to those of a lover inspired by ardent passion. He would sit by her, his heart overflowing with burning words which found no utterance; he would listen to and answer her, and, while seeming to be deeply engrossed in all she was telling him, would try at times to take her hand, which she would give him without observing that she did so, in a cool and friendly manner.

At other times she would seem tenderer and more loving; watching her intently, with the eyes of a lover who is conscious of possessing a portion only of his mistress' heart, Mariolle saw perfectly

well that this comparatively affectionate demeanor proceeded from her having that day encountered no particular distraction or excitement to occupy her mind. Her continual delays also proved to Mariolle how little she cared for these meetings. One always hastens toward that which one desires; but every pretext is seized with readiness to postpone the hour for a disagreeable duty. A singular comparison occurred to him in connection with this. During the summer the desire for his cold plunge made him hurry his daily toilet, while in frosty weather he welcomed anything that happened to postpone his hour for the douche. The rendezvous at Auteuil, it seemed to him, must be for her what his winter douches were to him.

After a while she assigned the dates for their meetings at longer and longer intervals, and then would often postpone them to the next day, sending a dispatch at the last moment, pleading lame excuses that she thought would be acceptable, but which threw him into nervous mental and physical excitement. If she had shown decided coldness, shown that she was bored by the passion which she saw and felt constantly increasing, he would probably have been at first angry, then offended, then discouraged, and finally appeased. On the contrary, however, she appeared fonder of him than ever, flattered by his love, more anxious to retain it, and she continued to show him a preference that began to arouse the jealousy of all her other admirers. She never could see him often enough at her house, and the same telegram that would postpone the rendezvous would always pressingly invite him to dinner or to spend the evening with her. At first he took these invitations as meant for a

salve after the disappointment, but at last he came to understand that she very much liked to have him with her: that she needed his words of admiration, his glances of love, the discreetly caressing atmosphere of his presence. She needed him just as any idol needs worshipers in order to become a god: in the empty chapel it is only a piece of carved wood, but let even one devotee enter, prostrate himself and pray and the piece of wood is transformed into a god equal to Allah or Brahma. Madame de Burne felt born to fill the rôle of a fetish; fitted by nature to triumph over men by virtue of her beauty, grace, charm, and coquetry, she was preëminently a sort of human goddess, delicate, disdainful, exacting, and haughty, exalted and apotheosized by the incense of men.

She manifested her predilection and affection for Mariolle almost openly, careless of what people would say; perhaps with a secret desire to inflame and exasperate her other adorers. He was almost always to be found at her house, generally in the big fauteuil that Lamarthe called "the pulpit," and she experienced sincere pleasure in remaining entire evenings alone with him, chatting and listening to him talk. She enjoyed this intimacy in which he revealed his soul, this contact with a cultivated man of superior mind who belonged to her as absolutely as the little bibelots scattered about her salons. She also revealed to him much of her inner life, her thoughts, in these confidences that are as sweet to give as to receive; feeling herself more open with him, franker, more sincere, than with any other person, and loved him the more accordingly. With him, also, she experienced that impulse, inherent in many women, to impart some of their most intimate per-

sonality, to confide all that was possible of her inner self, a thing she had never before felt impelled to do. In her eyes this appeared a great deal for her to do, but to him it seemed little; he longed for, he hoped for, the great final abandonment of her soul to him, a gift she had never yet bestowed in answer to his caresses. As to caresses, she seemed to regard them as useless, tiresome even. She submitted to them not indifferently but with quickly following weariness, the weariness succeeded by ennui. Even the slightest caresses seemed to fatigue and unnerve her. For instance, when in talking together, he would take one of her hands and hold it in his, and kiss the fingers one after the other as if they were bonbons, she would always seem anxious to get it away, and all up his arm he could feel the effort she made of withdrawal. When at the end of his visits, he would impress on her neck, between the collar of her dress and the little fluffy curls at the nape of her neck, a long kiss, which sought the aroma of her body through the folds of material covering it, she invariably made a slight retreating movement, and he could detect an almost imperceptible shrinking of her skin under his lips.

All these signs pierced him like stabs from a knife; and he would leave her presence with wounds that bled ceaselessly in his hours of solitude. How was it that she had not had at least that period of intoxication that in almost every woman follows voluntary abandonment of herself to a lover? This interval, often short and often followed by fatigue and disgust, is very rarely missing altogether. This mistress had made of him not a lover, but a sort of intelligent associate. Still, what had he to complain

of? Those who give themselves in their entirety perhaps had not so much to give.

He did not pity himself, he only feared: he feared that other, the one who would come all at once, met to-day or to-morrow, artist, society man, officer, strolling player, it did not matter who, born to please this woman, who would please her because he was born for that purpose: the one who would arouse in her for the first time the imperious desire to love. Already he was jealous of the future, just as he had been jealous of the unknown past, and just as all the intimates were jealous of him. Some believed he was her lover; others, following Lamarthe's opinion, thought she was simply amusing herself, driving him insane, just to annoy and exasperate them—but nothing more serious. Her father was disturbed and made remarks to her that were received with hauteur, and the more people talked, the more she persisted in testifying openly her preference for Mariolle by departing from the prudent circumspection that had regulated her life.

He, however, growing uneasy over the murmurs of suspicion, spoke of them to her.

"What does it matter to me?" she asked.

"Well, if you really did love me——"

"But do I not love you, *mon ami?*"

"Yes, and no. You love me very much at home, in your own house—and very little elsewhere. I should prefer the contrary for my own sake—and for yours, too."

She began to laugh, and answered:

"One can but do one's best!"

"Oh, if you knew," he answered, "how hard I try to make you love me! But the more I try, the more it seems to me that I am trying to seize some-

thing intangible, to clasp a statue of ice that gradually melts away in my arms."

She scarcely answered, rather disliking the subject, and put on that *distraite* look that she wore so often at Auteuil. He did not dare to pursue the theme, but gazed at her as one sees amateurs at museums gaze at objects that they long to carry away with them.

His days, his nights, now contained for him only hours of suffering, for he lived with the fixed idea that she was his, without being his, captive yet free, in his hold, yet out of his grasp. He lived about her and near to her, and did not reach her, and he loved her with all the unsatisfied hunger of his body and soul. Just as he had done at the foreshadowing of their liaison, he began to write letters to her. By means of pen and ink he had succeeded in overthrowing her virtue—perhaps by the same means he would be able to overcome this new and secret resistance.

Making fewer visits to her house, he repeated in almost daily letters the inanity of his effort to make her love him. Now and again, when he had been specially eloquent, passionate, grief-stricken, she would vouchsafe an answer. Her letters, dated for effect: "Midnight," "One a. m.," "Two a. m.," etc., were bright, terse, well-expressed, encouraging, and yet disheartening to him. She reasoned clearly, wrote wittily, and even with imagination. But in vain he read and reread them; in vain he pronounced them just, intelligent, well-expressed, graceful, and satisfying to his vanity as a man. They did not come from the heart; they did not really satisfy any more than did the kisses given in the cottage at Auteuil.

He could not at first understand how this was; but by dint of reading them over and over he came to see the reason. It is by studying their writings that one contrives most thoroughly to understand people. Words spoken dazzle and deceive because we watch the eyes and the lips of the utterer: the eyes and the lips please and allure, but the black words on the white paper betray the naked soul.

Men succeed by the cunning use of rhetoric, by professional dexterity, by practice in using the pen continually in the affairs of life, in being able to disguise their natures in what they express on paper either in impersonal, utilitarian or literary prose. But women rarely write except to speak of themselves, and they put a little of their personality into every word. They know no tricks of style, and they betray themselves by the naïveté of their expressions. He called to mind the correspondence of celebrated women: how clearly the writers had revealed themselves, the pedants, the witty women, the sentimental ones.

What was striking in Madame de Burne's letters was the utter absence of sensibility. This woman could think; but she could not feel. He recalled letters he had had from other women, for he had had many. A little *bourgeoise,* met during his travels, and with whom he had contracted a liaison that lasted three months, used to write him delicious, vibrant letters, full of delightful and unexpected turns. He had often been astonished at the flexibility, the vivid elegance, the variety of her style. How did she come by it? Simply through her capacity for feeling—nothing more. A woman does not elaborate her periods; emotion, pure emo-

tion, dictates her phrases: she uses no dictionary. When she feels strongly she writes expressively, without any trouble, or any studied elegance, aided by the sincerity of her nature.

The truth in Madame de Burne's nature came to her assistance, and she wrote the letters of a clever and amiable woman. Mariolle tried to discover more than this by reading between the lines, but there was nothing more to find. How was it she had found so little to send to him? For her he had found words like burning coals dropping from his pen.

When his valet brought him his mail, Mariolle's eyes always searched among the letters for the longed-for handwriting. When he had found it, an involuntary emotion would surge up in his heart, making it throb wildly; he always took this letter first, and would dwell on the address before tearing open the envelope. What would she say? Would the word "love" be there? She had never yet used that word without adding "well" or "very much": "I love you well," or "I love you very much." How thoroughly he was used to this formula that lost all power by using additional words! Can there be much or little in loving?

To love "very much" is to love poorly: one "loves"—that is all—it cannot be modified or completed without being nullified. It is a short word, but it contains all: it means the body, the soul, the life, the entire being. We feel it as we feel the warmth of the blood, we breathe it as we breathe the air, we carry it in ourselves as we carry our thoughts. Nothing more exists for us. It is not a word; it is an inexpressible state indicated by four letters. Mariolle had become the victim of this lit-

tle verb; and his eye ran along the lines trying to decipher in them some revelation of tenderness resembling his own. He certainly found enough to justify him in saying: "She loves me well," but never what would enable him to cry: "She loves me!" Her letters continued the pretty and poetical romance begun at Mont St. Michel; it was literature relating to love, but it was not love.

When he had finished reading and rereading her letters he would put the cherished sheets carefully in a drawer, and sit down in his fauteuil, where he passed many hours devoted to sad thoughts.

After a while she wrote but rarely, tired no doubt of repeating the same things over and over. Besides, she was undergoing a sort of social crisis that André had felt approaching, with that increase of suffering which the slightest disagreeable incident will produce in troubled souls. It was a winter of fêtes. Paris was in the grip of a whirlwind of pleasure: all night long, fiacres and coupés rolled along the streets, with apparitions of white-clad women behind their windows. Nothing was spoken of but comedies, balls, matinées, and soirées. It was like an epidemic of pleasure attacking all classes of society, and Madame de Burne did not escape contagion.

The attack began with her by a success attained at a ballet performed at the Austrian Embassy. Through the intervention of the Comte de Bernhaus, relations had been established between Madame de Burne and the ambassador's wife, Princesse de Malten, who had taken a violent fancy to her. They became intimate friends in a short time, and by this means Madame de Burne obtained the

entrée to the most exclusive circle of diplomatic and aristocratic society. Her grace, beauty, and intelligence, her rare wit, soon enabled her to make good her footing there; she became the fashion, and soon the carriages of the *élite* found the way to her door. Every Monday a long file of them with armorial bearings emblazoned on their doors stood along the sidewalk in the Rue du Général Foy, and her servants, losing their heads, confused duchesses with marchionesses, countesses with baronesses, in announcing the high-sounding names at the door of the salon.

Madame de Burne was charmed. The compliments and invitations lavished on her, the homage tendered, the feeling of having become one of that elect band, flattered and adored by all Paris, the joy of seeing herself petted, admired, sought everywhere, inspired in her an intense spirit of snobbishness.

Her artistic clan rose in revolt; and this bond of common feeling brought about an intimate alliance among the band of friends. Even Fresnel was welcomed into the body corporate: he was enrolled and became a force in the league of which Mariolle was the head, the others well knowing the influence he wielded with her and the friendship she entertained for him. But he could do nothing except look on helplessly at her floating joyously away on the tide of popularity and society, like a boy gazing aloft at his red balloon that has broken away and is mounting toward the clouds.

He felt that that great and secret happiness which he had never entirely despaired of was now drifting away from him forever. He was jealous of everything and everybody, of men, of women, of

inanimate things. He detested all that pertained to the life she was now leading, all the people she met, all the fêtes she attended, the balls, the concerts, the theatres, for each took a portion of her being, and they absorbed her days and nights. This fierce resentment corroded his soul; his health began to suffer, and his altered looks struck Madame de Burne, who asked him:

"What is the matter with you? You are changed: you have got so thin!"

"The matter is that I love you too much," he replied.

She flashed him a grateful glance, murmuring:

"One cannot love too much, *mon ami!*"

"Do I hear *you* say that?"

"Why, of course!"

"You do not comprehend that I am dying of loving you in vain!"

"In the first place you do not love me in vain; and, in the second, people do not die of love. To sum up, all my friends are jealous of you, which proves that you cannot be so very badly treated by me."

"You do not understand," he said, taking her hand.

"Yes, I do; I understand you very well."

"You understand the desperate appeal that I am continually addressing to your heart?"

"Yes, I understand it, and it causes me much pain, because I love you enormously. But then ——"

"Well?"

"You see, you keep saying to me: 'Be like me; think, feel, and express yourself as I do.' But I can't, my poor boy. I am as I am. You will

have to accept me as God has made me, since I have given myself to you, a thing which I do not regret, which I have never desired to retract, for you are to me dearer than any being that I have ever met."

"You do not love me!"

"I love you with all the power for loving that is in me. If the power is not greater than it is, is it my fault?"

"If I felt sure of the truth of what you say, I should be able to content myself."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I believe you to be capable of loving more intensely, but that I also believe myself incapable of evoking a real feeling of love in you."

"You are mistaken, *mon ami.* You are more to me than any one has ever yet been or ever will be. I believe this absolutely, at least. When with you I possess the great merit of being truthful, of being sincere, of not simulating what you would desire me to feel: many women are not so sincere as this. Now, allow me credit for this, do not excite yourself, do not get overstrung; try to feel confidence in my affection, which is entirely and truly yours."

He murmured, realizing how far apart they were from each other: "Oh, what a peculiar way of understanding and speaking of love! For you, I am simply a person whom you desire to have often seated in a chair near you. For me, you are the entire world. I know only you, I feel only you, I want only you."

She smiled benignly and said:

"I know it, I guess it, I comprehend it. I am

delighted at it, and say: 'Love me always as much as that if you can, for this is my greatest happiness, but do not compel me to act a farce which would be unworthy of us both.' For some time now I have been anticipating this crisis, and I feel it keenly, for I am deeply attached to you, but I cannot bend my nature and make it like yours. Take me just as I am."

"Have you ever experienced a feeling, for even only a day, an hour, that you could love me differently?" he asked all at once.

She was nonplused, and reflected for some minutes. He waited in anguish of mind, and continued:

"Now, you see, you see! You *have* dreamed of another sort of love!"

"I may have been mistaken in my own impressions for a moment," she murmured slowly.

"Oh, what a subtle, psychological quibble!" he cried. "One cannot dissect in that way the impulses of the heart!"

She mused again, interested in her own thoughts, interested in this matter, in this attack upon herself, then she said:

"Before loving you as I now love, I had imagined, I think, for a moment that I should feel for you more ardor, but in that case I should certainly have been less simple, less frank, perhaps less sincere later on."

"Why less sincere later on?"

"Because you fence love in with the formula 'All or nothing,' and in my opinion, this means, 'All at first, nothing afterward.' It is when the nothing begins that a woman commences to be insincere."

He answered in great perturbation of spirit:

"But you don't understand my wretchedness and the torture it is to me to imagine that you might have loved me differently. You have conceived this idea: therefore, there must be another whom you will love some day in this way."

"I don't believe there is," she replied unhesitatingly.

"But why? Why, since you have had the presentiment of this love, have been visited by a suspicion of this irrealizable and torturing hope of mingling your life, your soul, your flesh with those of another, of merging his being in yours and yours in his? Since you have felt the possibility of all this you will experience the reality some day."

"No. It was my imagination that misled me, and I that misled my imagination. I give you all I have to give. I have thought over all this a great deal ever since I have been your mistress. Do you notice that I fear nothing—not even words? Really, I am almost positively convinced that I cannot love more or better than I do at present. You see, I am speaking to you as I do to myself. I do this because you are so very intelligent, you grasp everything so fully, you penetrate to the root of a matter. It is best, therefore, to hide nothing from you: to do so is the only means to bind us together closely and for a long time: this is what I long for, *mon ami.*"

He listened to her as a man dying of thirst seizes the cup tendered to him; then he fell on his knees, his forehead touching her dress. He held her little hands to his mouth, crying:

"Thank you! thank you!" When he finally raised his head to look at her, her eyes were filled with tears; then in her turn, crossing her arms

around André's neck, she drew him to her gently, and kissed him on his eyelids.

"Sit down," she said. "It is not prudent to kneel like that in here."

He sat down, and after a silence of several instants during which they gazed at each other, she asked him whether he would take her some day to the exhibition of the sculptor, Prédolé.

She had in her *cabinet-de-toilette* a specimen of his work, a bronze figurine, a Cupid pouring water into the bath, and she wished to see the display of his entire works now on view in the Galerie Varin.

They set a date, then Mariolle rose to go.

"Will you come to Auteuil to-morrow?" she asked, very low.

"Oh, yes, indeed!"

And he left, dizzy with joy, intoxicated by the "perhaps" that never dies away in hearts that love.

CHAPTER IX

LOVE'S TORTURE

A COUPÉ of Madame de Burne's, drawn by horses going at full trot, rolled along the Rue de Grenelle. The hail of the last wintry storm, for it was a day in early April, beat noisily against the glass of the coupé, and rebounded into the road already whitened by the icy grains. Passers-by hurried on under their umbrellas, their coat collars drawn up over their necks. After two weeks of fine weather, an odious revival of winter had set every one shivering.

Her feet in a footwarmer, her body wrapped in a coat of rich fur whose velvety caress warmed her through her dress, feeling delicious where it touched her delicate skin, the young woman was reflecting with disinclination that in an hour she would have to take a fiacre and go to meet André at Auteuil. A strong desire to send a telegram postponing the meeting almost prevailed, but she repressed the impulse, for two months ago she had promised to do this as seldom as possible. Since that time she

had been making a great effort to love André as he loved her. Seeing him suffer so keenly, she had been overcome with pity, and, after the conversation during which she had kissed him on the eyelids, in a burst of real tenderness, her sincere affection for him became for a period warmer and more expansive.

Surprised at her involuntary coldness, she had asked herself why she should not, in the end, love him as much as other women did their lovers, since she felt deeply attached to him and he pleased her more than any other of her admirers.

This apathy she experienced must proceed from an indolence of the heart, which could be overcome like any other form of indolence.

She tried to overcome it. She attempted to rouse herself by thinking about him, by exciting herself on the days of their rendezvous, and in this she succeeded at times, just as one works one's self up to feel afraid in dwelling on apparitions and burglars when alone at night. Growing interested in this game of love, she even tried to be more caressing and succeeded pretty well at first, nearly driving Mariolle wild with intense delight.

Then she imagined she felt developing in herself a fever similar to that consuming her lover. Her intermittent dream of love that had seemed realizable the evening when she decided to give herself to André, the evening of the milky mists covering the Bay of St. Michel, again appeared; not so seductive, less wrapped in clouds of idealism and poetry, but more definite, more human.

She continued to simulate passion, to multiply the days of rendezvous, telling him: "I love you more and more." But fatigue overcame her, and a

powerlessness to deceive herself and him for any length of time. This she became aware of by the vague lassitude experienced on the mornings of the days of their meetings. How was it that on those days she did not feel, as did most other women, her frame agitated by the glowing anticipation of his embrace? She submitted to his embraces, accepted them, tenderly resigned, at first, then overcome, brutally conquered, vibrant in spite of herself, but never conscious of exaltation. Was this because her flesh, so delicate and fine, so exceptionally aristocratic, retained unconscious modesty, superior and sacred qualms of modesty of which her soul, so thoroughly modern, had been ignorant?

Mariolle understood, little by little. He watched the factitious ardor die down. He divined her self-sacrificing effort, and a mortal, an inconsolable grief took possession of his soul.

She knew now as well as he that the test had failed and that all hope was lost. On this April day, warmly wrapped in furs, sighing with a sensation of well-being as she heard the hail rattle against the glass, she felt her courage waver at the idea of deserting the luxurious coupé to brave the icy interior of a fiacre and go to meet André.

But she never entertained the thought of breaking away from his caresses and refusing to go to Auteuil. Well she knew that in order to captivate a man, to keep him for one's self away from rivals, it is necessary to hold him by that physical chain that was beginning to gall her: this she knew, for it is logically indisputable. Loyalty also demanded that she should go to meet him, and she desired to be loyal. So she would give herself again, she would always give herself; but why so often? Would not

the meetings hold a greater charm for him, an added charm, if they took place more seldom, if they were looked upon as rare and inappreciable opportunities for bliss offered by her, which must not be lavished too prodigally?

Always, on her way to Auteuil, she felt the consciousness of bringing him a most priceless offering, an inestimable gift. When one gives in this manner, the joy of giving is inseparable from a certain sense of sacrifice; it is not the joy of being loved, it is the pride of being generous, and the contentment of making another person happy.

She even calculated that the love of André would be more likely to be durable if she refused herself occasionally to him: for all hunger is intensified by fasting, and what is sensual desire but an appetite?

As soon as she had made the resolution she decided to put it into practice that day. She would go to Auteuil, but she would feign indisposition. As soon as this determination was made, the trip for which she had felt such distaste a moment ago seemed quite easy to undertake. Smiling to herself, she understood what had brought about the change in her feelings, after a moment's consideration. She had not wished to go, because all the little details of the rendezvous were on her mind: how she always pricked her fingers with the steel pins, which she was very awkward in handling, and how she was never able to find any of her articles of apparel in the room where she had hastily divested herself of them, preoccupied already by the odious prospect of having to dress without a maid. She stopped then, struck by a thought over which she wished to ponder: was it not a little vulgar, a little repugnant to her, that idea of love at a certain hour, fixed

beforehand, like a business appointment or one with a doctor or a dentist? After a long *tête-à-tête* what was more natural than a kiss shared by lips that had been uttering warm and tender speeches? But how very different was the kiss without surprise, arranged for beforehand, that she went to receive once a week, her watch in her hand. How true it was that on the days she was not to see André she often felt vague impulses to go to him; while these feelings rarely came to her when she went to him with the precautions of a suspected thief, in a dirty fiacre, her mind distracted by a thousand other matters.

Ah! the hour for Auteuil! She had counted the minutes to it on the clocks of all her friends; she had watched it coming, minute by minute, at the De Frémines', at the Marquise de Bratiane's, at the lovely Madame Le Prieur's, when she went about Paris on those afternoons so as to avoid being at home, where an unexpected visit or some unforeseen obstacle might prevent her getting away.

"Since I am to take a holiday I shall not go there too early," she said to herself. So she opened at the front of her coupé a sort of little invisible placard, hidden under the black silk with which her coupé, a veritable boudoir, was lined and padded. As soon as the two tiny doors of this hiding-place were pushed back on each side, appeared a mirror on hinges, which she raised to a level with her face. Behind the mirror were placed in niches of satin different little silver articles—a powder puff, a pencil for the lips, two perfume bottles, an inkstand, a penhandle, scissors, a tiny paper cutter. An exquisite clock, as large and as round as a black

walnut, was affixed to the silk; it indicated four o'clock.

"I have about an hour," said Madame de Burne to herself. She touched a spring, which made the footman seated by the coachman take the acoustic tube in his hand; taking the other end, hidden in the hangings, she put her lips to the little *porte-voix* carved in the rock crystal.

"To the Austrian Embassy," she ordered.

Then she looked in the mirror. She gazed at herself as she always did, with the contentment one experiences in meeting the person one loves best in the world; then she opened her coat to look at her corsage. It was a costume for the end of the winter; the collar was trimmed with a band of very fine white feathers. This trimming came up over the shoulders also, and the waist, as well, was encircled with this border of down, that gave the young woman a bizarre appearance, something like that of a wild bird. On her hat, a sort of toque, other feathers appeared—a bold aigrette of vivid colors, and her strikingly pretty face, with its blonde, fluffy hair, seemed ready to fly up with the wild ducks into the gray sky through the hail.

She was still contemplating herself in the mirror when the coupé drove through the great gates of the Embassy. She fastened up her coat, put down the mirror, shut the door of the recess, and said to the coachman when the coupé stopped:

"Return to the house; I do not need you any more." Then to the footman advancing on the steps of the entrance:

"Is the Princess at home?"

"Yes, Madame."

She went in, climbed the staircase, and pene-

trated to the little salon where the Princesse de Malten was writing letters. On seeing her friend enter, the ambassador's wife rose with an exclamation of delight, her eyes shining, and they kissed each other twice on each cheek, just at the corner of the lips. They sat down together on two little chairs in front of the fire. These two women were very congenial; they were a good deal alike, both being of the same type, developed in the same atmosphere and guided by the same tastes, although Madame de Malten was a Swede, wife of an Austrian. They exercised upon each other a mysterious and peculiar attraction, from which proceeded a sentiment of genuine contentment when together. Sometimes they would gossip without intermission for entire half days; futile gossip, interesting to them simply on account of their similarity of tastes.

"Now, you see how much I love you!" cried Madame de Burne. "You are to dine with me tonight, and yet I could not resist the temptation of coming to see you. It is simply a passion, my dear!"

"A passion which I share," answered the Princess, smiling. Moved by habit, each did her best to win the admiration of the other, coquettish as if a man were present, but differently coquettish, no longer in the view of an adversary, but in that of a rival. Madame de Burne, while chatting, glanced at the clock. It was almost five; he had been waiting, therefore, for an hour.

"It is late enough," she said to herself, and she rose to go.

"Already?" exclaimed the Princess.

"Yes, I am in a hurry. Some one is waiting for me," said Madame de Burne daringly. "I'd

much rather stay with you, though." The Princess having set to fetch a fiacre, they embraced and parted. The horse limped painfully as it dragged the fiacre along. Madame de Burne seemed to feel the infirmity and fatigue herself as she noticed this; like the broken-winded animal, she found the transit long and tedious. The pleasure she felt at the idea of seeing André consoled her, but the remembrance of what she was about to do worried her.

She found him standing behind the door, half frozen; between the trees the sleety showers were descending, whirled by the wind, the hail rattling on their umbrellas as they went toward the cottage, their feet deep in the mud. The garden was withered, dead, miry. André looked very pale; he was suffering.

"*Mon Dieu!* how cold the weather is!" she exclaimed, as they entered. A fire was blazing in the room; as it had been lighted since noon only, the house was damp, and she felt herself shiver.

"I don't think I'll take off my furs at once," she remarked. She opened the front of her coat only, and revealed the feather-trimmed corsage, in which she looked like a bird of passage. He sat down beside her.

"I'm going to give a charming dinner this evening, and I feel delighted at the prospect," she announced.

"Who is to be there?"

"Why, you, of course; then Prédolé, whom I have so longed to know."

"Prédolé is coming!"

"Yes. Lamarthe is bringing him."

"He seems rather a strange person for you to

ask. Sculptors are, as a rule, scarcely the kind of men to appeal to women of your type, and Prédolé least of all."

"Oh, nonsense, my dear! I admire him so much."

During the last two months, since his exhibition at the Galerie Varin, the sculptor, Prédolé, had been the rage in Paris. He had been admired before that; people had said, "He makes delicious figurines"; but when the artistic public had viewed all his creations assembled on exhibition, an outburst of enthusiasm had occurred. They discovered in them an unexpected charm, the outcome of the artist's special gift in reproducing elegance, making his representations of form peculiarly seductive.

He had adopted the specialty of statuettes very slightly clad, and in this had produced specimens of inimitable perfection. His *danseuses,* particularly, of which he had exhibited a good number, showed in their gestures, their poses, in the harmony of their attitudes and movements, the climax of feminine flexibility and grace of form.

For a month, Madame de Burne had been making continual efforts to induce him to come to her house; but the artist was shy, even a little boorish, it was said. She managed to succeed at last, through the intervention of Lamarthe, who had made a frenzied appeal to the grateful sculptor.

"Who else is coming?" asked Mariolle.

"The Princesse de Malten."

He felt annoyed; he did not like this woman.

"Who else?"

"Massival, Bernhaus, and Georges de Maltry. That is all—only my *élite.* You know Prédolé, do you not?"

"Yes, a little."

"What do you think of him?"

"He is, of all the men I know, the one most truly in love with his art, and the most interesting when he speaks of it."

She was delighted to hear this, and said: "How charming!"

He had taken her hand under her fur coat and pressed it a little; now he kissed it. This made her remember that she had neglected to say that she did not feel well, so, seeking another pretext, she murmured:

"*Dieu!* How cold the weather is!"

"Do you think so?"

"I am frozen to the bone."

He got up and looked at the thermometer, which was certainly indicating very low temperature; then he sat down beside her again. She had just said: "*Dieu!* How cold the weather is!" and he imagined he knew why. During the last three weeks he had observed at each of their meetings a diminution of her efforts toward tenderness of feeling. He divined that she was weary of this simulation of affection—so weary that she could not keep it up, and he was himself exasperated to such a degree at her inability to love him, and so harassed by a mad and futile desire for this woman, that he began to say to himself: "I'd rather break with her than continue like this!"

In order thoroughly to understand her intention, he asked her: "You are not even going to take off your furs to-day?"

"Oh, no," she replied. "I have been coughing a little ever since the morning. This frightful weather affects my throat; I'm afraid I shall be

ill." Then, after a pause: "If I had not wanted so much to see you, I should not have come at all."

As, seized with rage and torn with grief, he did not answer, she went on:

"After such beautiful weather the last two weeks, this change is very dangerous."

She gazed out into the garden, where already the trees were almost white under the drifting snow eddying around the branches. He looked at her, thinking: "This is the sort of love she has for me!" For the first time, a sort of hatred against her possessed him, a hatred for her, for her face, her intangible soul, her body, so eagerly pursued and so elusive.

"She pretends that she is cold!" he said to himself. "She is cold just because I am here. If she were invited to some function of pleasure, one of those imbecile caprices that fill the useless existences of these useless creatures, she would brave all, she would risk life itself to go. She goes out on the coldest days in winter in an open carriage, just to display her toilets, very often. They are all alike, these women, nowadays." He looked at her, calmly facing him, and he knew that, in spite of the serenity of that adored little face, she felt an intense desire to cut short this *tête-à-tête* that was becoming so painful.

Was it possible that there ever had existed, that there existed now, women capable of passion, who, overcome by emotion, suffered, wept, gave themselves with delight, who loved with their bodies as intensely as with their souls, with the mouth that speaks, the eyes that gaze, the heart that palpitates, and the hand that caresses; women who brave all

because they love, who day or night, spied on and menaced, go, intrepid and palpitating, to throw themselves into the arms of a lover? How horrible this love of his for the woman to whom he was chained; a love without result or aim, without joy or triumph, without sweetness or intoxication, that brought nothing but regret and care, suffering and tears, in its train; only suggesting the ecstasy of partaken caresses by the intolerable disappointment of kisses unreturned by those cold lips, arid and sterile as dead branches.

He looked at her, imprisoned and charming in her feathery gown. Were they not powerful enemies, enemies to be conquered even as the woman herself, these costumes, jealous guardians, coquettish and sumptuous barriers, fencing his mistress in and keeping her from him?

"Your gown is beautiful," he said; he would not touch on that which was inflicting torture upon him.

"Wait till you see the one I am going to wear to-night!" she returned, smiling. Then she made several little coughs, and said:

"I am catching cold. Let me go now, *mon ami;* the sun will shine again very soon, and I shall follow his example."

He did not press her to stay, disheartened, knowing well that no effort now could overcome the apathy of that inert love; that all was over, over forever. No hope existed of hearing passionate words issue from that serene mouth, or seeing the light of love in those calm eyes. Suddenly he felt arise in him a desire to escape from this torturing domination. She had nailed him to a cross; he bled from every pore, and she looked on, watching

him in agony and not comprehending his sufferings, pleased even to have inflicted them.

He would wrench himself free from this instrument of torture even though he left there portions of his body, fragments of his flesh and all his lacerated heart. Like an animal in whom the weapons of the hunter have left a little remnant of life, he would drag himself to some solitude where perhaps his wounds might cicatrize and thereafter betray their existence only by dull, aching pain.

"Good-by, then," he said.

Struck by the sadness of his voice, she remarked:

"We shall meet again this evening, *mon ami.*"

"Yes—this evening," he repeated, as he went with her to the garden door. Then he came back to sit alone by the fireside. Alone! Yes, it certainly was cold—and how sad! Well, it was all over now. Oh, what a horrible thought! No more hoping, expecting, dreaming of being with her, dreaming with that glow at the heart that at times makes of beings on this dull earth, for some ineffable moments, beacons illuminating the rayless night. Good-by to those nights of solitary emotion, when he walked the room till almost daylight, thinking of her; and the awakenings when he would say, opening his eyes: "I shall meet her in a few hours in our little cottage."

How he loved her! How long and hard the task would be to cure himself of this! She went away because the weather was cold! He recalled her as she sat a little while ago there, looking at him, bewitching him, in order the more deeply to stab his heart. Well, she had already pierced it pretty thoroughly; he could feel the hole, an old, gaping wound, opened just now anew by the knife

of her utter indifference so that it was now incurable; he could feel something flowing from it, surging up in him and choking him. Placing his hands before his eyes, as if to hide his weakness from himself, he began to weep. She went away because the weather was cold! He would have walked, naked, through the snow anywhere to meet her. He would have jumped from a roof, only to fall at her feet. The recollection of an old legend occurred to him, one attached to the "Hill of the Two Lovers," seen in going to Rouen. A young girl, obeying the mandate of a cruel father who forbade her marrying her lover unless she carried him to the top of the mountain, dragged him there, walking on her hands and feet, but fell dead on gaining the summit. Love is nothing now except a legend: a legend useful for furnishing material for songs or romantic fabrications. Had not his mistress herself uttered at one of their first interviews a sentiment which he had never forgotten? "The men of to-day do not love the women of this era to the degree of inflicting injury on themselves. Believe me, I know them, both the men and the women." She had made a mistake as far as he was concerned, but not with regard to herself, for she had gone on to say: "As for me, I warn you that I am incapable of deep feeling for any one—no matter whom." "No matter whom!" Was she sure? For him she was right, he was aware of that; but for another? She could not love him; but why not? Then the consciousness of having missed everything life had to offer overcame him: a consciousness to which he had for a long time been prone.

He had done nothing, succeeded in nothing, obtained nothing, conquered nothing. Art had tempted

him, but he had lacked the courage to devote himself to any special branch and the persistency necessary to insure victory. No success had come to rejoice him, no elevated tastes of any kind had ennobled or exalted his character. The one sincere, whole-hearted effort he had made to conquer the heart of a woman had proved futile, like everything else he had attempted; at best he was nothing but a failure. He continued to weep, his hands covering his eyes, the tears trickling down on to his mustache and lips.

When he again raised his head he saw that it was night. He just had time to go home and dress to go to Madame de Burne's dinner.

CHAPTER X

THE LAST STRUGGLE

ANDRÉ MARIOLLE was the first guest to arrive at Madame de Burne's that evening. He sat down and gazed around him at the walls, at all the objects that he had loved because they were hers—the paintings, the *bibelots,* the furniture, all that familiar interior, where he had learned to know her, where he had felt his passion intensify from day to day, until it had won its useless victory. How often and how ardently he had waited in this pretty room made expressly for her—a delicious setting for an exquisite gem. How well he knew the odor of the salon, clinging to the hangings and all its belongings—the simple, aristocratic scent of the iris. In this spot he had trembled with expectation, had pulsed with hope, had run the gamut of all the emotions. He pressed as if they were the hands of a

friend that he was forsaking the arms of the large fauteuil in which he had so often sat chatting with her, watching her talk and smile. He would have liked her not to come into the room; have liked it to remain with him its only occupant, remaining all through the night, dreaming of his love, as one watches over the body of a beloved one; and then to have gone away at dawn for a long time, perhaps forever.

The door opened. She entered and came toward him, her hand outstretched. He mastered himself and betrayed no emotion. This was not a woman, but a bouquet of flowers—an inimitable bouquet. A band of pinks clasped her waist and fell all around her down to her feet in cascades. Around her bare arms and shoulders ran a garland of myosotis and lilies of the valley, while three fairylike orchids seemed to proceed from her throat and caress the pale flesh of her bosom with their supernatural pink and red. Her blond hair was powdered with enamel violets, in which flashed diamonds; and other brilliants, trembling on gold pins, scintillated like drops of water in the perfumed trimming of her dress.

"I shall have a headache," she said, "but I can't help that. This is very becoming."

She smelt like a garden in springtime, and looked fresher than her flowery adornments. André looked at her, dazzled, and thinking that it would be as barbarous to take her in his arms at this moment as to trample on a beautiful flowerbed. Women's bodies were nothing but pretexts for display, objects for ornamentation, nowadays; they were not meant to inspire love. They looked like flowers, like birds, like hundreds of things as much as like

women. Their mothers, all the women of past generations, employed art to enhance their beauty, but they tried, above all, to please by the natural seduction of their bodies, their grace, the irresistible attraction that the feminine being exercises over the hearts of men. To-day, coquetry was the whole armament, artifice the means and also the end, for they made use of it more to irritate their rivals and to excite their envy and jealousy than to captivate men.

For whom was this toilette arranged—for him, the lover, or to humiliate the Princess de Malten?

The door opened and she was announced. Madame de Burne made a bound toward her, and, carefully mindful of the safety of the orchids, she embraced her with a little cry of delight, and a kiss, a pretty and most desirable kiss, was exchanged by the two mouths. Mariolle quivered with anguish. Never had she run toward him with such happy impetuosity; never had she kissed him with such fervor, and again the words recurred to him: "These women are not made for us."

Massival appeared, then behind him M. de Pradon, the Comte de Bernhaus, and Georges de Maltry, resplendent with English *chic*. Only Lamarthe and Prédolé were now wanting to complete the party. They began to speak of the sculptor, and every voice was raised in eulogy.

"He had resuscitated the grace, regained the traditions of the Renaissance with something additional—modern sincerity. He was, according to M. Georges de Maltry, the exquisite expositor of human flexibility." These sentences had for two months now been going the rounds of all the salons, given out by all mouths, listened to by all ears.

At last he made his appearance. Every one was surprised. He was a short man, of uncertain age, with the shoulders of a peasant and a strong face, with well-marked features and grizzly hair and beard, a powerful nose, thick lips, and a timid and embarrassed air. He held his arms rather far from his body, a habit attributable, no doubt, to the enormous hands that protruded from his sleeves. They were thick through, with hairy, muscular fingers, the hands of a Hercules or a butcher, and they appeared clumsy and embarrassed at being *en évidence,* but impossible to hide.

His face, however, was illumined by a pair of bright, piercing gray eyes of extraordinary vivacity. They seemed the only live part of this dense, heavy man. They looked, scrutinized, searched, flashed everywhere, with sharp, rapid, and mobile glances, and it was felt that a great and quick intelligence directed the movements of these questioning eyes.

Madame de Burne, a bit disappointed, politely indicated a chair, and the artist sat down. He sat there, confused, scarcely knowing what to say. Lamarthe, adroit in matters of tact, wishing to relieve him, went up to his friend.

"*Mon cher,*" he said, "I wish to show you where you are. You have already seen our divine hostess; now look at all she surrounds herself with."

He pointed to an authentic bust of Houdon on the mantel; then, on a Boule secretary, two women dancing, with their arms entwined, by Clodion; finally, on an *étagère,* four Tanagra statuettes, chosen from among the most perfect specimens. Then the face of Prédolé lighted, as if he had been wandering in a desert and had suddenly met one of his children. He got up and walked toward the

little antique figures, and when he seized two of them at once in his formidable hands, Madame de Burne feared for them. But as soon as he had grasped them it almost seemed as if he were caressing them, he handled them with so surprising a supple cleverness, twisting them about in his thick fingers, suddenly become agile as those of a juggler. Watching him look at and touch these figures, it became evident that this heavy, stout man had in his soul and in his hands an ideal and delicate tenderness.

"Do you think them pretty?" asked Lamarthe.

Then the sculptor descanted on their beauty and spoke of other remarkable figures he knew of in a rather husky voice, but quietly and decidedly, his language being dictated by an astute mind that weighed and understood well the value of words. Conducted by the novelist, he then inspected the other rare *bibelots* which Madame had accumulated, thanks to the counsels of her friends. He appreciated them with joy and astonishment at finding them in this place; and he always took them in his hands and turned them about on all sides, as if to put himself into tender contact with them. A bronze statuette, heavy as a cannon ball, was hidden in a dark corner; raising it with one hand, he brought it near a lamp, admired it in a leisurely manner, then put it back in its place without visible effort.

"He's built to struggle with stone and marble, that chap!" remarked Lamarthe. They all looked at the sculptor with sympathy.

A servant announced: "Madame is served."

The mistress of the house took the arm of the sculptor, to pass into the dining-room, and when

she had made him sit at her right, she asked him, with courtesy, just as she would have interrogated the scion of some illustrious house as to the origin of the family name:

"Your art, Monsieur, has the merit of being the most ancient of all the arts, has it not?"

"*Mon Dieu,* Madame!" he answered in his quiet voice, "the shepherds in the Bible played the flute; music appears the most ancient, although, in our sense, real music does not date very far back. But veritable sculpture goes a long way back."

"Do you like music?" she asked.

"I love all the arts," he answered, with grave conviction.

"Is the inventor of yours known to fame?" she asked again.

He thought a moment; then, with a gentleness of speech as if he were relating a touching story, he answered:

"According to tradition, it was the Greek Dædalus. But the prettiest legend is that which attributes the invention to a potter of Sicyone named Dibutades. His daughter, Kora, having drawn with an arrow the shadow of her fiancé's profile, the father filled in the silhouette with clay and modeled it; then my art was born!"

Lamarthe murmured: "Charming!" After a silence he said: "Ah! if only you would, Prédolé!" Then, addressing Madame de Burne, he said:

"You don't know, Madame, how interesting this man is when he talks of what he loves; how well he knows how to describe it and to make all others adore it!"

But the sculptor did not seem inclined to pose or to make speeches. He had tucked his napkin

into the front of his shirt, so as not to soil his dress-coat, and he was eating his soup with the attention, even respect, that peasants always feel for that part of the dinner. Then he drank a glass of wine, and sat up, looking more at ease and as if he were growing acclimatized. From time to time he tried to turn round, for he perceived, reflected in a mirror, a modern group of statuary, placed behind him on the mantel. He did not know it, and sought to find out the sculptor. At last, being no longer able to stand it, he asked:

"That is one of Falguière's, is it not?"

"Yes, it is one of Falguière's," answered Madame de Burne, smiling. "But how did you find that out, just in the mirror?"

"Madame, I recognize, it does not matter how, at a single glance the sculpture of men who also do painting, and the painting of men who also do sculpture. It is never the same as the work of a man who confines himself strictly to one art."

Lamarthe, wishing his friend to shine, demanded explanations of this, and Prédolé gave them. He defined and characterized the paintings of sculptors and the sculpture of painters, in so clear, original, and novel a manner, in his slow, precise way, that the guests listened as much with their eyes as with their ears. He went back in the history of art, epoch by epoch, citing examples of each, till he reached the first Italian masters, painters and sculptors at the same time: Nicolas and Jean de Pise, Donatello, Lorenzo Ghiberti. He quoted the opinions of Diderot on the same subject, and, in conclusion, cited the gates of the Baptistery of St. Jean de Florence by Ghiberti, *bas-reliefs* so vivid and dramatic that they look like paintings on canvas.

With his great hands working in front of him as if they were full of material to be modeled, and moving so lightly and flexibly that they delighted the eye, he reconstituted the specimens of art under consideration with such conviction that every one followed with interest, his fingers creating in air above the plates and glasses all the images described in words. Then, on being offered something he was fond of, he left off talking and began to eat. During the rest of the dinner he spoke little, scarcely following the conversation, which veered from theatrical gossip to politics, from a ball to a marriage, an article in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* to the horse-races, recently opened. He ate well and drank moderately, without appearing to be affected by it, having a clear, strong, sane head, not easily disturbed by good wine.

When they had returned to the salon, Lamarthe, who had not yet obtained all he wished from the sculptor, drew him to a glass case and showed him a priceless *bibelot,* a silver inkstand engraved by Benvenuto Cellini.

Then a sort of intoxication seemed to overcome Prédolé. He contemplated the inkstand as if it were the face of a mistress, and, seized with emotion, gave utterance in regard to the work of Benvenuto Cellini of ideas as fine and graceful as the work of that divine engraver; then, seeing that all were listening, he let himself go, he warmed to the subject, and, seated in a deep fauteuil, holding and gazing continually at the gem which had been put into his hands, he related his impressions on all the marvels of art known to him, revealed his sensibility, and showed the strange intoxication produced in his soul by the influence of forms of grace

observed by the eye. For ten years he had wandered over the face of the earth, observing only marble, stone, bronze, and wood, carved by cunning hands, or gold, silver, ivory, and brass metamorphosed into *chefs-d'œuvre* under the fairy fingers of engravers. And he himself worked as he spoke, creating bas-reliefs and delicious, modeled objects evolved in the mind by the precision and expressiveness of his diction.

All the men seated around him hung upon his words, while the women seated near the fire seemed rather bored, chatting in low voices from time to time, wondering how any one could feel so enthralled by talking over so simple a matter as the contours of objects.

When Prédolé left off, Lamarthe, excited and delighted, pressed his hand, and said, in a voice softened by the influence of a common love:

"Really, I feel like embracing you. You are the only artist, the only impassioned and great artist of to-day; the only one who really loves what he works at, finds happiness in it, never weariness or disgust. You handle art, eternal art, in its purest, simplest, highest, most inaccessible form. You create the beautiful by the curve of a line and you care for nothing else on earth. I drink your health in a glass of *eau-de-vie!*"

Then the conversation became general, but it hung fire, stifled by the ideas that had been given out in that pretty salon furnished with precious objects. Prédolé left early, giving as his excuse that he began work every morning at daybreak. When he had gone, Lamarthe, enthusiastic, asked Madame de Burne:

"Well, how did you like him?"

She answered slowly, with an indifferent look: "Oh, well enough; but he is rather long-winded."

The novelist smiled, thinking: "*Parbleu!* he did not admire your toilette; and you are the only *bibelot* here that he scarcely noticed." After some polite speeches, he went over to the Princess de Malten, in order to flirt with her. The Comte de Bernhaus came up to the hostess, and, seating himself on a little tabouret, seemed to be prostrate at her feet. Mariolle, Massival, Maltry, and M. de Pradon continued to speak of the sculptor, who had greatly impressed them. M. de Maltry compared him to the ancient masters whose entire lives were illuminated and embellished by the exclusive and overmastering love of manifestations of beauty, and he elaborated his opinion with subtle, exact, and elaborate phrases that were rather tiresome.

Massival, tired of hearing an art spoken of that was not his own, went to Madame de Malten and sat next to Lamarthe, who soon gave up his place to him, going to rejoin the other men.

"Shall we go?" said he to Mariolle.

"Yes—willingly."

The novelist enjoyed talking at night, going along the street, accompanying some one home. His dry, strident voice seemed to cling to and climb up the walls of the houses. He felt himself to be eloquent and clear-sighted, witty and original on these nocturnal tête-à-têtes, when he monologued rather than chatted. He earned for himself a quiet success that soothed him, and he prepared himself a quiet night's rest by this slight fatigue of the legs and the lungs.

Mariolle was at the end of his endurance. All

his misery, his ill-fortune, his grief, all his irremediably bitter disappointment had been seething in his heart ever since he crossed her threshold that evening. He could endure no more; he would go away, never to return. When he said adieu to Madame de Burne, she returned his farewell with an absent-minded air. The sidewalks had become gray and dry again, but in the roadway patches of wet still shone in the gaslight. Lamarthe said:

"What a happy man Prédolé is! He loves only one thing, his art; thinks only of that, lives only for that, and it fills, brightens, and makes his existence happy. He is emphatically an artist of the old kind; he does not care much about women, that man—our kind of women, that is, with the ornaments, the laces and other disguises. Do you notice how little attention he paid to our fine ladies, who are, nevertheless, very fascinating? All that appeals to him is plastic art: nothing artificial. It is true that our charming hostess judged him insupportable and imbecile. In her eyes, a Houdon bust, an inkstand by Benvenuto Cellini, Tanagra figurines, are only little ornaments created for the setting of a rich *chef-d'œuvre*—herself! Herself and her dress, for her dress is a great part of herself; it is the new note which she gives each day to her beauty. How futile and personal a woman is!"

He stopped and knocked the sidewalk with so sharp a rap of his cane that the noise reverberated for some time along the street. Then he went on:

"They know, understand, and enjoy what makes them effective—dress and jewelry, which change in fashion every ten years—but they know nothing of any subject that requires delicate artistic penetration and a purely æsthetic, impersonal exercise of

the senses. Besides, they have very rudimentary senses; the senses of women are not capable of a high degree of training, they are not susceptible to anything that does not appeal directly to their feminine egotism. Their cleverness is that of the savage, the Indian, of combat and trapping. They are even incapable of enjoying material delights that require the education and strict attention of a physical organ, such as the palate; and if any exceptions do happen to succeed in fathoming cuisine, they go no farther, for they are incapable of appreciating good wine; that addresses itself only to the gustatory organs of men—for good wine speaks."

He gave on the pavement another staccato tap of his cane, which accentuated the last word and gave point to the sentence, then he went on:

"One must not expect too much of them. But this absence of taste and comprehension, which limits their intellectual vision when it has to do with elevated things, blinds them still more when it has to do with us. To attract them, it is not necessary, as it was in other days, to possess soul, heart, intelligence, or exceptional and high attributes, as when women loved a man for his high-mindedness or his courage. Those of to-day are strolling players, the strolling players of love, repeating the words of a piece which they act from tradition, but which they do not believe in. To act it they need men who are strolling players, too, to complete the lines and to fill out the lying piece."

They walked on some moments in silence, side by side. Mariolle had listened, mentally repeating the phrases, mutely approving the verdict of his friend with all the grief in his heart. He knew, moreover, that an Italian, Prince Epiati, a sort of

adventurer, had come to give fencing lessons in Paris, who was much spoken of, and whose elegance and supple vigor, exhibited in aristocratic circles and in the *cocoterie* of the *élite,* enhanced by a costume of clinging black silk, was monopolizing the attention and the coquettish efforts of the little Baronne de Frémines. As Lamarthe continued to be silent, he said:

"Well, it's our fault! We choose the wrong sort. There must be other kinds of women."

"The only ones capable of love," answered the novelist, "are the shop-girls and the sentimental young women of the middle classes, poor or ill-married. They are overflowing with sentiment, but such vulgar sentiment that to expose ours to contact with it seems to profane it. Now, what I say is this: That in our class of life, where the women need and desire nothing except to be amused without running any risks, and where the men have subordinated pleasure to the same rules and regulations as work, the old, charming, powerful attraction that caused the sexes to gravitate toward each other has disappeared."

Mariolle murmured: "It is true."

His desire to fly increased—to fly far from these people, these puppets, who because they had nothing to do mimicked the passionate life, beautiful and tender, of other days, incapable of tasting the sweetness of it.

"Good night," said he, "I am going to bed."

He went in, sat at his table, and wrote:

"Adieu, Madame. Do you remember my first letter? I said adieu then, but I did not go. What a mistake I made! Need I explain to you why I say this? Men like me never should meet women

of your type; if I had been an artist, and if my emotions had been capable of expression in such a manner as to afford me relief, you might have endowed me with inspiration; but, as it is, I am only an unhappy being whom love for you has filled with horrible and unendurable pain. When I first met you I never should have believed myself capable of feeling and suffering in this manner. Any other woman in your place would have, in animating my heart, have inspired it with happiness—but you have simply tortured it. I know it is in spite of yourself. I do not reproach you and I bear you no ill-will. I have not even the right to send you these lines; forgive me for doing so. You are so created that you cannot so much as guess at what I experience when I go to see you, when you speak to me, when I look at you. Yes—you consent, you accept me, and you even offer me a calm and peaceful happiness for which I ought to thank you on my knees all my life. But I do not desire it. Ah! what a fate is his who demands of the woman he ardently loves the boon of a fervent word, a passionate caress, and who never receives it! I am famished for want of love, like a poor beggar who has stood in vain with outstretched hand for many weary days at your gates. You have thrown me from time to time costly gifts, but never a morsel of bread, and it was bread, love, that I needed. I am going away, miserable and poor, beggared of your tenderness, a few crumbs of which might have saved me. All I have now in the world is a cruelly haunting thought which I must do my utmost to kill; and this is what I am going away to do. Pardon, thanks, pardon! I love you with my whole soul. Adieu. ANDRE MARIOLLE."

CHAPTER XI

A KNIGHT ERRANT

THE radiant morning was gilding all Paris. Mariolle got into the carriage waiting for him at his door with two trunks and a suitcase behind. He had made his valet pack the night before everything necessary for a long absence, and was leaving as his provisional address Fontainebleau, Poste-restante. He was going entirely alone, wishing to leave behind everything that could possibly recall Paris.

"*Gare de Lyon!*" he cried to the driver, and the fiacre started on its way. Then he began to think of that other departure—the leaving for Mont St. Michel last summer; in three months it would be a year since then. But he must not dwell on these thoughts, and he looked out into the street.

The carriage was entering the Avenue des Champs Elysées, bathed in a flood of spring sun-

light. The budding leaves, already freed from their brown coverings by the warm weather of the preceding weeks and uninjured by the two days of hail and cold rain, seemed almost visibly to open, so quickly they developed on this luminous morning; and Mariolle perceived a subtle odor of sap and growing branches. It was one of those mornings of nascent life when in the public gardens the horse-chestnuts begin to exhibit their blossoms, decorating the trees like lustres on chandeliers. Earthly life was in process of awakening all around: even the bituminous pavement seemed to quiver dully, as if upheaved by the stirring roots beneath. Shaken by the jolts of the fiacre, he thought to himself: "At last I am going to have peace of mind. I am going to watch the spring arise to birth in the forest."

The journey seemed a long one. He was as much unstrung by these few hours of sleeplessness spent in dwelling on his grief as if he had watched for ten nights by the bedside of a dying man. When he got to Fontainebleau he went straight to a notary's office, to ascertain if there was not some furnished cottage to let near the forest; he was told of several. The one whose photograph attracted him the most had just been vacated by a young couple who had spent the winter at the village of Montigny-sur-Loing. The notary, although a sedate man, smiled, evidently suspecting a love affair. He asked:

"You are alone, Monsieur?"

"I am alone."

"No servants, even?"

"No servants, even. I left mine in Paris, and I shall engage some from the neighborhood. I came here wishing to work in perfect isolation."

"Oh, you'll easily have that at this season of the year."

A few moments later, Mariolle and his trunks were in an open landau, on the way to Montigny. The forest was awakening. The tops of the great trees were beginning to be clothed with a dark shadow of green; the underbrush, however, was more advanced, and the birches, with their silver trunks, seemed already in their early summer garb. The immense oaks showed only trembling patches of verdure at the tips of their branches. The beeches, responding still later to the call of spring before opening their pointed buds, were dropping the last dead leaves of the previous autumn. All along the way the grass, not yet shaded by the impenetrable branches, was stiff, shining as if varnished by the new sap, and the odor of nascent vegetation, already noticed by Mariolle in the Champs Elysées that morning, was all around him now, like a bath of germinating life under the vivifying sun. He drew in the air with long breaths, like a captive just liberated, and with the feeling of a man whose fetters have just been broken, he stretched himself back in the landau, allowing his arms to hang on either side, his hands dropping above the wheels. How good it was to draw in this splendid, free, pure air! He must continue breathing it a long, long time; he would have to do so, in order to saturate himself sufficiently to allay his sufferings, and to feel its grateful zephyrs entering through his lungs and playing soothingly on his heart-wound.

He went through Marlotte, where the driver showed him the Hotel Corot, then just opened, whose originality was much spoken of. Then they followed a road commanding the forest on the left,

and on the right a great plain, with trees here and there and hills on the horizon. Finally they entered a long village street, a blindingly white street between two rows of little houses roofed with tiles; near one occasionally an enormous lilac covered with blossoms overtopped a wall.

This street followed a valley which descended to the bank of a river. When Mariolle saw it he was delighted; it was a narrow river, rapid, noisy, and whirling, on one side washing the walls of gardens, on the other side meadows, with trees whose branches were turning light green.

Mariolle had no trouble in finding the house indicated by the notary, and was charmed with it. It was an old house restored by an artist who had spent five years there; then, having grown tired of it, had rented it. It was very near the river, separated from it only by a garden ending in a terrace bordered by yews. The Loing, which had just jumped from a dam one or two feet high, ran alongside the terrace with loud murmurings. From the windows of the front of the house one could see the meadows on the other side of the river.

"I shall grow cured here," thought Mariolle. He had arranged matters with the notary in case he should be pleased with the house, and the driver of the landau returned with his answer. Now he had to see about moving in, which did not take long, the secretary of the mayor sending him two servants, one to cook, the other to look after his linen and to see to the house.

Downstairs there was a parlor, a dining-room, a kitchen, and two other small rooms; on the next floor a fine bedroom and another room which the artist proprietor had made his atelier. All these

were beautifully furnished by a man evidently in love with the country and the house; but now the freshness had departed and the house was a little out of order, with a deserted air such as a house wears whose master has abandoned it.

He could tell, however, that the house had not been long unoccupied: a sweet odor of verveine clung around it still. Mariolle said to himself: "Aha! *verveine!* A very simple perfume. The wife of the last tenant was evidently not a woman of extravagant tastes. Happy man!"

Night was approaching, all this business having taken time. He sat down near an open window, drinking in the sweet, humid freshness of the damp grass and watching the setting sun cast long shadows across the meadows.

The voices of the two servants preparing the dinner ascended the stairway, and through the window came the lowing of the cows, the barking of dogs, and the shouts of men driving animals or talking to their friends across the river. Mariolle asked himself for the hundredth time that day: "What did she think when she got my letter? What will she do?" Then he wondered: "What is she doing at this moment?"

He looked at his watch—half-past six. "She has gone home and is receiving."

A vision rose before him of the salon and the young woman chatting with the Princess de Malten, Madame de Frémines, Massival, and the Comte de Bernhaus. His soul at once became filled with rage. He wanted to be there; this was the hour at which he went there every day, and he felt within himself an uneasiness, not a regret, for his determination was unchanged; but a sort of physical uneasiness,

akin to that experienced by an opium fiend when he has failed to obtain his dose of the drug at the accustomed hour. He no longer saw the meadows or the sun disappearing behind the hills on the horizon; he only saw her in the midst of friends, engrossed by that worldly life that had robbed him of her.

"I will not think of it any more!" he said, aloud.

He got up and went down into the garden, and walked to the terrace. The coolness of the water leaping over the weir arose in mist from the river, and the sensation of the damp cold chilled his already heavy heart and made him retrace his steps. The table was set in the dining-room. He dined quietly; then, having nothing to do, feeling conscious of that uneasiness of soul and body increasing, he went to bed and tried to sleep. But in vain. His mind saw, his mind suffered, his mind never left that woman.

Whose mistress would she become now? The Comte de Bernhaus', no doubt. He was exactly suited to this woman who so loved display, that elegant, *distingué* man! He must have pleased her, for she had exercised all the wiles at her command upon him, although the mistress of another. Under the obsession of these harassing ideas he nevertheless grew sleepy, and fell into slumberous wanderings in which she and the comte constantly appeared to him. Real sleep refused to come, and all night he saw these two, haunting him, braving and irritating him, disappearing long enough just for him to drop into sleep and then coming back and waking him to feel that awful ache of jealousy in his heart. He got out of bed at the first streak of dawn and

went into the forest, cane in hand, a stout cane left behind by a former occupant.

The rising sun gilded the almost bare tops of the oaks, fell on the soft turf visible in spots and on the patches of dead leaves, survivors of the previous year. Yellow butterflies, like little dancing flames, fluttered along the way. A hill, almost a mountain, covered with pines and bluish rocks, appeared on the right side of the road. Mariolle climbed it slowly, and when he had reached the top, sat down on a big stone. He was already panting; his legs refused to carry him, quaking with weakness, his heart palpitated, and all his body seemed aching and bruised. He knew that this did not proceed from fatigue; it came from that love weighing upon him like an intolerable burden, and he moaned: "What misery!"

His attention, over-excited and sharpened by the dread of this condition that would perhaps be so difficult to change, now turned to himself, and he searched his soul, looked into his innermost consciousness, trying to understand better what manner of man he was, and to reveal to his own eyes the reason of this inexplicable attack of weakness.

He said to himself:

"I am not a passionate man, nor a dreamer. I have more judgment than instinct, curiosity than appetite, imagination than persistency. At bottom I am merely a fastidious, delicate, and intelligent voluptuary. I have enjoyed the good things of this life without attaching myself too strongly to them; have enjoyed them with the discrimination of an expert who tastes but does not become intoxicated, who understands them too well to lose his head over them. I reason over everything, and I, as a

rule, analyze my tastes too well to be subjugated by them blindly. This is my great failing, the sole cause of my weakness. And yet, this woman has taken possession of me in spite of myself, in spite of my fear and my knowledge of her; she possesses me just as if she had taken away, one by one, all the different aspirations existing in me.

"I was drawn toward inanimate things; toward music which allures me, nature which softens me, thought which is the epicureanism of the spirit, and toward all that is agreeable and beautiful on earth. Then I encountered a creature who summoned together all my wavering impulses and desires, and, aiming them toward herself, out of them created love. Pretty and graceful, she pleased my eyes; witty and intelligent, she pleased my soul, and she pleased my heart by a mysterious sympathy experienced in her presence and evolved by contact with her; also by a secret and irresistible sort of magnetism which conquered me just as certain plants stupefy persons who come near them. She has monopolized me completely, for I now aspire to nothing, wish for nothing, desire nothing, and care for nothing on earth. Before I knew her, with what delight should I have watched this forest awakening into life! To-day I do not see it, I do not feel it. I am not in it. I am always with this woman whom I wish no longer to love. But I must cease! I must try to chase these thoughts away by fatigue; otherwise, I shall not cure myself."

He got up, descended the rocky hill, and began to walk with long strides. But his obsession weighed him down as if it were a great burden he was carrying. He went on, walking faster and faster, meeting occasionally, when he caught sight of a patch

of sunlight on the turf under the branches, or felt a resinous whiff from a clump of fir trees, a brief sensation of comfort, like a presentiment of consolation in the distance. All at once he stopped: "I am not walking, I am fleeing!" He was fleeing, it is true; fleeing, pursued by the anguish of this shattered love. Then he began to walk more quietly. The forest changed its aspect, became more umbrageous, for he was entering that part where beeches predominate. There was no sensation now of winter, just a feeling of spring as fresh and young as if it had only come into being that very day. Mariolle penetrated into the thickets under the gigantic trees which seemed to grow taller and taller. He walked a long time, an hour, two hours, through the branches and through the innumerable hosts of little shiny, varnished leaves. The great arch of the tops of the trees supported by columns slanting or straight, sometimes whitish, sometimes dark with black moss, veiled the sky now from him. The trees stood one behind the other, in indefinite numbers, dominating the shrubs at their feet and covering them with thick shade, through which, however, shafts of sunlight managed to percolate. The rays pierced their way in through the foliage, which no longer looked like a wood, but a brilliant, vaporous mass of verdure flecked with luminous gleams.

Mariolle stopped short, seized with inexpressible admiration. Where was he? In a forest, or had he fallen to the bottom of the sea, a sea all leaves and light, an ocean gilded with greenish sunlight?

He felt better, farther from his sorrow, more hidden, calmer, and he lay on the ground on the russet carpet of dead leaves which these trees only

part with in gaining their new foliage. Luxuriating in the contact with the fresh, reviving earth and in the pure sweetness of the air, he was soon seized by a desire, at first vague, then more definite, not to be alone in this heavenly spot. He said to himself: "Oh, if she were only here with me!"

Suddenly Mont St. Michel stood before him, and he recalled how different she had been then from what she had been in Paris, in that awakening of love vitalized by the winds from afar, by the neighborhood of the great expanse of yellow sands. It seemed to him as if on that day only she had loved him a little—just for a few hours. Certainly, on the road while they followed the receding tide, in the cloister when murmuring his name, "André!" she had seemed to say: "I am yours!" On the *Chemin des Fous,* when he almost held her in his arms in the midst of surrounding, illimitable space, she had felt for him a sort of rapturous feeling that had evaporated when her foot touched the pavement of Paris, and had never returned. But here with him, in this bath of verdure, in this other tide made of new sap, would not the fugitive and sweet emotion felt on the coast of Normandy have reëntered her heart? He lay stretched on his back, lost in thought, his gaze fixed on the great tree-tops above, and little by little he shut his eyes, soothed by the tranquillity of his stately neighbors. At last he dropped off to sleep, and when he awoke and looked at his watch he perceived that it was half-past two.

He got up feeling less sad, less sick at soul, and set off again. Soon he emerged from the thick wood into the large *carrefour,* where six incredibly high avenues met like the points of a star, losing themselves in leafy and transparent vistas in em-

erald-tinted air. A post set forth a placard with the legend: "The King's Bouquet." It was certainly the kingdom of the beeches, and this *carrefour* was the capital. An empty carriage passed. Mariolle engaged it, and had himself driven to Marlotte, thence back to Montigny, after he had eaten at the inn, for he was hungry.

He recollected having noticed this establishment the day before—the Hotel Corot, which had just been opened and was mediævally decorated *à la* Chat Noir in Paris. He got down there, and went through an open door into a vast hall where the old-fashioned tables and clumsy stools seemed to be awaiting roysterers of a bygone century. At the end of the room a woman, a young servant maid, no doubt, standing at the top of a small ladder, was hanging old plates on hooks too high for her to reach. Sometimes poised on the tips of both feet, sometimes on the tip of one, she stretched herself against the wall, with one hand leaning on it, a plate in the other, with graceful and pretty movements, for her waist was small and the undulating line from her wrist to her ankle underwent changing grace at each of her alterations of poise. As her back was turned, she did not hear Mariolle come in. He stopped to look at her, and the remembrance of Prédolé occurred to him.

"Ah! how pretty!" he exclaimed. "She is very supple, that little girl."

He coughed. The girl was so surprised that she nearly fell over, but as soon as she had recovered her equilibrium she jumped to the floor from the top of the ladder with the lightness of a tight-rope dancer, then came smiling toward the customer:

"Monsieur would like?"

"I should like to have breakfast, Mademoiselle."

"It would more likely be dinner," she ventured to suggest. "It is half-past three."

"We shall say dinner, then, since you wish it so," he replied. "I have been lost in the forest."

Then she told him what dishes were at the disposition of customers. He made his selection and sat down. She went to give the order, then came back and began to set the table. He followed her with his eyes, and found her dainty, neat, and quick. Dressed suitably for her work, her sleeves turned up, her neck bare, she had an alert little air that was pleasant to see, and her corset defined perfectly a little waist of which she was, no doubt, extremely proud. Her rather red face, flushed by the strong country air, appeared too plump, but it had the freshness of a spring flower, with its brilliant brown eyes, wide-open mouth full of splendid teeth, and chestnut hair whose abundance indicated the vitality of the vigorous young body.

She brought radishes and butter, and he began to eat and saw her no more. Wishing to drown his thoughts, he ordered a bottle of champagne, and drank it all, then two glasses of kümmel after his coffee; then, as he was almost fasting, having eaten nothing before leaving except a little cold meat and bread, he soon felt himself invaded by a sensation of intense giddiness which he took for forgetfulness. His sad thoughts, his grief, his anguish seemed drowned in the wine, which had in that short time transformed his tortured heart into an almost callous one. He went back to Montigny and went to bed at once. But he awoke when it was pitch dark, ill at ease, and worried as if a nightmare, chased away some hours ago, had reappeared furtively to

disturb his sleep. Madame de Burne was there, walking all around his bed, with the Comte de Bernhaus.

"Aha!" said he. "I am jealous now; how is that?"

Why was he jealous? He very soon knew why. While he was her lover he knew, in spite of his fears and his anguish, that she was true to him; wanting in warmth, in tenderness, but resolutely faithful. Now he had broken away from her, he had given her her liberty—all was over. Would she remain now without a lover? For some time, no doubt, and then? That very fidelity that had attached her to him until now, had it not had its source in the vague presentiment that if she left him, Mariolle, through weariness, she would be forced after a certain time, longer or shorter, to replace him, not through passion, but because she was tired of solitude, just as she would have sent him away, being tired of him? Do not some women keep their lovers on indefinitely, with resignation, simply through fear of their successor? Besides, to change her lover would not have seemed correct to a woman like her, too intelligent to be swayed by prejudice, but endowed with a delicate moral sense which would protect her from real pollution. Philosophical society woman, not middle-class prude, she did not shrink from a secret attachment, but her fastidious nature would have recoiled with disgust from a succession of lovers.

He had set her at liberty—and now? Now she would certainly take another lover, and it would be the Comte de Bernhaus. Mariolle felt certain of it, and he suffered indescribably. Why had he broken off with her? He had left her, knowing her to be faithful, friendly, and charming. Why? Because

he was a sensual brute, knowing nothing of love except its physical transports.

Was this really so? Yes; but there was something else besides—there was the fear of suffering. He had fled before the grief of not being loved as he loved; before the cruel dissension that had arisen between them, the unequal tenderness of their kisses, the incurable pain in his heart. He had dreaded the continuance for years of that anguish that had lasted for several weeks seeming like months. Weak in this, as in everything else, he had shrunk from pain, just as he had all his life shrunk from any great effort. He was incapable of carrying anything to its conclusion, as incapable of immersing himself in passion as he would have been of immersing himself in work, if he had attempted to follow any art or science.

Until day dawned he was a prey to these self-analyzing conclusions, which worried him like a pack of wolves; then he got up and went down to the riverside. A fisherman was casting his net near the weir. The water whirled around in the light, and when the man drew out his net, to spread it on the broad end of his boat, the little fish glittered through the meshes like quicksilver. Mariolle grew calmer in the morning air, in the steam rising from the waterfall in which danced little rainbows; the current flowing past him seemed to be carrying away some of his grief in its incessant and rapid flow. He said: "Truly I did right. I should have been too wretched."

Returning then to the house, he took a hammock he had noticed in the porch, and, bringing it down to the terrace, hung it between the yews. Throwing himself into it, he tried to think of nothing and

watch the water flow by. Breakfast time found him in a sweet torpor, enjoying a physical well-being that communicated itself to his soul, and he lingered over the meal as long as possible to kill time. One expectation worried him—the coming of the mail. He had telegraphed to Paris and written to Fontainebleau, to order his mail to be sent on. Nothing, so far, had come and a feeling of forlornness began to oppress him. But why should it? He could not expect anything agreeable, consolatory, reassuring, in the little black box hanging at the postman's side: nothing but useless invitations and banal communications. Therefore, why desire these papers as if the salvation of his soul depended on them? Was it possible that he cherished at the bottom of his soul the vain hope that she would write to him? He asked one of the old servant women:

"At what time does the mail come?"

"At noon, Monsieur."

Noon was just at hand. He began to listen to the noises outside with great anxiety: a knock soon sounded on the front door. But the postman only brought some newspapers and three unimportant letters. Mariolle read and re-read the papers, grew bored, and went out. What would he do? He went toward the hammock, and again stretched himself in it; at the end of half an hour an imperious wish to move about took possession of him. Where would he go? To the forest? Yes, the forest was delicious, but the solitude there was even more insistent than here in the house, for there were always noises in the village, and that loneliness, that silence of trees and leaves, filled him with sadness and regret, plunged him into wretchedness. In his revery he went over his long walk of the day before, and when

he thought of the little waitress at the Hotel Corot, he said to himself:

"I'll go there and have dinner!"

The idea seemed to cheer him: it would be something to do, would make several hours pass, and he started out at once. The long village street stretched straight out into the valley between two rows of low, white houses, roofed with tiles, some built in a straight line along the road, others at the end of little yards in which lilac trees flourished, hens scratched in manure-heaps, and staircases with wooden railings entered doors set in the walls. Peasants were slowly working about their houses at different forms of work. He noticed a bent old woman with hair grizzled and yellowish, in spite of her age, for rustics seldom have white hair, dressed in a torn old waist and a scanty woollen skirt that revealed the outline of her thin and bony legs. She looked straight in front of her with eyes that held no spark of intelligence, eyes that had never beheld anything except the few, simple objects necessary to her sordid existence. A younger woman was hanging out clothes before her door. The movements of her arms, raising her skirt, showed thick, heavy ankles, and above them bones, large, flat bones in blue stockings, while her waist and chest, flat and wide as those of a man, revealed a shapeless form repulsive to look upon.

Mariolle said to himself: "Women! Those are women!" The silhouette of Madame de Burne rose before his eyes. He recalled her, superb in elegance and beauty, a gem of humanity, coquettish and adorned for the eyes of men, and he quivered with the anguish of an irreparable loss. He walked on quickly to try to throw off these thoughts, and, when

he got to the Hotel Corot, the little maid knew him immediately and said almost familiarly:

"*Bonjour, Monsieur!*"

"*Bonjour, Mademoiselle.*"

"Do you wish something to drink?"

"Yes, to begin with; then I shall take dinner here."

They decided first what he should drink, then what he should eat. He consulted her, so as to make her talk, for she spoke prettily with the crisp Parisian accent and an ease of enunciation as noticeable as her ease of motion. He thought as he listened:

"She is quite pleasing, this young girl; she has the making of a *cocotte* in her, to my mind." He asked her:

"You are a Parisian?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"Have you been here long?"

"A fortnight."

"Do you like it?"

"Not yet; but it is too soon to tell. I am tired of the air of the city and the country is doing me good. That is what decided me to come here. Shall I bring you a glass of vermouth, Monsieur?"

"Yes, Mademoiselle, and please tell the chef or the cook to look well after my dinner."

"Do not fear, Monsieur."

She went out, leaving him alone. He went to a seat near a table in an arbor, where his vermouth was brought to him. He stayed there till the end of the day listening to a thrush in a cage and looking at times at the little maid, who coquetted with him, putting her best foot foremost for this gentleman, who evidently admired her. He went away, as on the night before, with a bottle of champagne

warming his heart; but the darkness of the way and the coolness of the night soon dissipated this effect and a deep depression entered his soul. He thought: "What shall I do? Shall I stay here? Am I fated to drag out this wretched existence much longer?" and it was late before he slept.

The next day he was swinging in his hammock, and the sight of the fisherman suggested to him to go fishing. A grocer where he bought a line gave him some instructions on the gentle sport, and offered to guide his first efforts. The proposition was accepted, and from nine to twelve by dint of strict attention and great zeal he succeeded in capturing three small fish.

After his midday meal he set out again for Marlotte. What for? To kill time. The little maid at the hotel began to smile as soon as she caught sight of him. He smiled at her in return, grateful for the recognition, and he tried to get her to talk. More familiar than on the previous day, she chatted with him and told him her name was Elisabeth Ledru. Her mother, a dressmaker, had died the year before; then her father had disappeared. He was a drunkard and had lived for years on the labor of his wife and daughter, and he knew that the girl could not maintain two persons out of her unassisted earnings.

Tired of leading a solitary life, she went to wait in a restaurant, remaining there about a year; then, as she felt tired of the city, she accepted the offer of the founder of the Hotel Corot to go and wait there, with two other young girls who were to arrive later.

This story pleased Mariolle, who, by questioning the girl with skill and treating her like a young lady,

learned all about the poor and dark home ruined by the dissolute father. She, a wandering girl, without ties but gay, notwithstanding, being young, recognized as genuine the interest felt in her by this stranger, and spoke to him with confidence and with an expansion that she could no more control than she could the free motions of her body. He said to her when she had finished:

"And so you wish to be a waitress all your life?"

"I don't know, Monsieur. How can I tell what may occur to-morrow!"

"Still, it is always best to think of the future."

She looked thoughtful for a moment; then her face cleared and she said:

"I shall take whatever comes my way!"

They parted good friends. He returned there a few days later, then again, then often, vaguely attracted by the naïve chatter of this girl, which dissipated his gloom to some extent. But when he got back at night to Montigny he had terrible attacks of melancholy. Always with the coming of dawn his heart lightened a little; but as soon as night fell again the fierce jealousy and heartrending regrets would settle on his soul again like evil birds. No news had arrived. He had written to no one and no one had written to him. He knew nothing. So he constantly dwelt on the liaison which he had foreseen would exist between his former mistress and the Comte de Bernhaus. This idea grew more fixed daily. The Comte would give her exactly what she wanted: a *distingué,* assiduous lover, unexacting, satisfied and flattered at being the preferred one of the witty and delicious enchantress. He compared the Comte to himself. Bernhaus doubtless would

never have those nervous attacks, those fits of impatience, that intense desire for affection that had broken off their liaison. He would be content with very little, being a tactful, discreet man of the world, not manifesting any tendency to strong feeling.

One day in arriving at the Hotel Corot Mariolle saw seated in one of the arbors two young men, sitting smoking. The proprietor, a stout man with a broad face, came forward to meet him, for he felt a friendly interest in this faithful customer; he said:

"I have had two new guests come since yesterday, artists."

"Those two gentlemen?"

"Yes. They have already become acquainted. The short one got his second medal last year."

Having communicated all he knew about the artists in embryo, he asked:

"What will you take to-day, Monsieur?"

"Send me a vermouth as usual."

Elisabeth soon appeared carrying a tray, with glasses, a decanter, and a bottle. When the artists saw her they called out:

"Well, little girl, are you angry still?"

She did not answer, and, when she drew near, Mariolle saw that her eyes were red.

"You have been crying?" he asked.

"Yes, a little," she answered simply.

"What has happened?"

"Those two gentlemen over there behaved badly to me."

"What did they do?"

"They took me for—something which I am not."

"Did you complain to the proprietor?"

She gave an expressive shrug of the shoulders:

"Oh, Monsieur! The proprietor! I know him now—the proprietor!"

Mariolle, touched a little and a little irritated, said:

"Tell me all about it."

She described the brutal behavior of the two blackguards toward her, immediately on their arrival. Then she began to cry, saying what would she do without money, friends, or resources in this strange place?

"Will you enter my service?" Mariolle proposed suddenly. "You will be well treated in my house, and when I return to Paris you can do what you please."

She looked at him attentively with questioning eyes; then answered, all at once:

"I am willing, Monsieur."

"What wages do you get here?"

"Sixty francs a month." She added anxiously: "And then I get tips here, too, you know, which brings it up to about seventy."

"I will give you a hundred."

"A hundred francs a month?" she repeated, surprised.

"Yes. Won't that suit you?"

"I should rather think it would!"

"You will only have to wait on me, take care of my clothes, and look after my room."

"Very well, Monsieur."

"When will you come?"

"To-morrow, if you like. After what has occurred I shall go to the mayor and oblige the proprietor to let me go."

Mariolle took two louis from his pocket and gave them to her:

"This is for good luck," he said.

A flash of joy illumined her face, and she said decidedly:

"I shall be at your house to-morrow, before twelve o'clock, Monsieur."

CHAPTER XII

A VENUS SURPRISED

ELISABETH arrived the next day at Montigny, followed by a countryman carrying her trunk in a wheelbarrow. Mariolle had discharged one of his old women with a handsome present in money to console her, and the new maid took possession of a little room next to the cook's on the second floor. When she presented herself to the master of the house, her manner was rather different from what it had been at the Hotel Corot; less expansive, humbler, since she had become the servant of the gentleman whose humble friend she had been at the Hotel Corot. He told her in a few words what her duties would be, and she listened attentively and settled down to her work. A week went by without the soul of Mariolle experiencing any change. All he noticed was that he left his home more rarely now, since he had no excuse for walking to Malotte and that he felt less sad than before. The great passion of his

grief subsided, as all transports of this nature must subside; but instead of the turbulence a deep depression of spirits began to possess him, one of those profound states of dejection that resemble a slow and chronic disease that often proves fatal. All his former activity, the interest that he took in the things that had heretofore busied and amused him, died away, and was succeeded by a disgust and an apathy which seemed to deprive him of even the strength necessary to go out and take a walk. His greatest distraction now was to lie in his hammock and look at the Loing flowing by and to watch the fisherman cast his net.

After her first days of shyness and reserve, Elisabeth grew bolder a little, and, remarking with her feminine instinct, the constant depression of her master, she said one day:

"Monsieur is feeling lonely?"

"Yes, very lonely," he answered resignedly.

"Monsieur should go and take a walk."

"It would not do me any good."

She lavished little secret attentions upon him. Every morning when he entered his parlor he found it full of flowers and odorous as a hothouse. Elisabeth must have bribed the boys of the village, for they brought her from the forest primroses and violets, and she also got contributions from the gardens in the village. Even though sunk in melancholy, Mariolle could not help noticing this, and felt pleased at the evidence of gratitude evinced by these many little, thoughtful cares.

He thought also that she was growing prettier, more dainty in her dress, that her face had grown paler, and, in consequence, more refined. He observed one day when she was giving him a cup of

tea that her hands were no longer those of a maid, but those of a lady, the nails carefully trimmed and irreproachably clean. Another time he noticed that her shoes were almost elegant. One afternoon she went upstairs and came down again, soon after, in a charming little gray dress of perfect taste. He cried on seeing her:

"Why, how coquettish you look, Elisabeth!"

She blushed to the roots of her hair, and stammered:

"I? Oh, no, Monsieur! I am dressing a little better because I have more money."

"When did you buy that dress?"

"I made it myself, Monsieur."

"You made it yourself? Why, I always see you working about the house all day long!"

"In the evening, sir."

"But where did you get the material? And who cut it out for you?"

She answered that the shopkeeper at Montigny had brought her some samples from Fontainebleau; she had chosen one and paid for the stuff with the two louis that Mariolle had given her. As far as the cutting and making were concerned, that was the easiest part, as she and her mother had worked for a *magasin de confections* for years.

He could not help saying:

"It is very becoming to you: you look very nice."

She crimsoned to her eyes. When she had left him he said to himself: "I wonder if she is falling in love with me."

He thought over it, hesitated, doubted, then finished by convincing himself that it was, after all, very possible. He had been kind, helpful, and com-

passionate, and almost a friend to her. What was there surprising in this young girl's falling in love with her master, after all he had done for her? The idea, moreover, was not an unpleasant one to dwell upon, the young girl being so very nice, with nothing suggesting a servant in her. His masculine vanity, wounded and crushed by another woman, began to be flattered, soothed, almost comforted.

It was a compensation, a very slight one it was true, almost imperceptible, but it was a compensation, for, after all, if love comes to any one, no matter who tenders it, it proves that the receiver is capable of inspiring the sentiment. His unconscious egotism was soothed by this. It would occupy his mind, perhaps healthfully, to watch this little heart awakening and commencing to throb for him. It never occurred to him to send the child away, in order to preserve her from the risk of undergoing what had caused his suffering: to have more pity upon her than had been felt for him; compassion seldom accompanies a sentimental triumph.

So he watched her and soon discovered that he was not mistaken, and every day confirmed his opinion. As she brushed against him one morning in waiting on table, he noticed in her clothing a smell of perfume, common perfume, furnished, no doubt, by the local shopkeeper. Then he gave her a bottle of toilet water of a kind that he himself used and always kept a quantity of on hand when away from home; also some cakes of good soap and some dentifrice and rice-powder. He thus aided the transformation that became every day more apparent and more complete, noted by him with a watchful and flattered eye. While still scrupulously attentive to her duties, and prudent in her conduct, she gradually

became *éprise,* her feminine instinct for captivating developing naïvely. On his part, he was growing by degrees to entertain an attachment for her. He was amused, touched, and gratified. He toyed with this budding affection, just as one toys with anything that can wile away sad hours; but he experienced for her only that vague feeling that impels a man toward any attractive woman, be she a pretty maidservant or a handsome peasant, a rustic Venus. What most attracted him in her was her femininity: he longed for that with a confused and irresistible longing, proceeding from his connection with that other woman who had aroused in him that invincible, mysterious quality in a man's nature, the imperious need of the presence, the contact of a woman, that aroma, subtle, ideal, or sensual, that is an attribute of every alluring woman, wherever found, be she of the lower orders or of the *élite* of society, Oriental maid with languorous black eyes or northern siren with eyes of azure—the immemorial attraction of the feminine being.

This tender, watchful, incessant attention, more perceptible than visible, seemed to enwrap his wounds in a sort of protecting medium that rendered them less sensitive to the recurring attacks of anguish. But these throes still existed, hovering about him like flies around a wound. Since he had forbidden his address to be given, his friends had respected his desire for seclusion, and he was above all tortured by absence of news. From time to time he read in the papers the name of Lamarthe or Massival in the lists of people who had been present at a grand dinner, or assisted at some fête. One day he saw Madame de Burne's appearing as that of one of the prettiest, most elegant, and most superbly

dressed of the guests at a ball at the Austrian Embassy. He shivered from head to foot. A little further down the list appeared the name of Comte de Bernhaus; until evening a frantic jealousy lacerated the heart of Mariolle. The suspected liaison was now placed beyond a doubt in his mind. It was one of those worrying, imaginary conclusions that are more harassing than certainties, for one never rids one's self of them. Able no longer to endure the suspense, he decided to write to Lamarthe, who, knowing him well enough to guess at the misery of his soul, might, perhaps, enlighten him, without being definitely questioned.

One evening, therefore, by candlelight, he composed a letter to him: a long one, cleverly expressed, vaguely sad, full of veiled interrogations and poetical utterances on the beauty of the country in spring. Four days after, on receiving his mail, he recognized at a glance the firm, upright handwriting of the novelist. Lamarthe sent him many details that added to his uneasiness. He spoke of a great many people; without particularly mentioning Madame de Burne and the Comte de Bernhaus, he put the two in focus, as it were, by one of those tricks of style peculiar to him, revealing much, yet not betraying that he did so. As a result, the letter confirmed all Mariolle's suspicions: his fears would soon be realized if they were not already so. The life of his former mistress was always the same—brilliant, exciting, worldly. He had been missed a little after his disappearance, after the fashion of those who pass away from sight; a little indifferent curiosity was evinced, and he was believed to be in far distant lands, having left Paris because he was weary of it.

After having received this letter he stayed till night, stretched in his hammock. He did not dine; he could not sleep. The next morning he felt so tired, so discouraged, so weary of the monotonous days spent between the dark, mysterious forest and the noisy little river, that he stayed in bed.

When Elisabeth came at the sound of his bell, and found him still in bed, she stopped still in the doorway and turned very pale. Then she said:

"Monsieur is ill?"

"Yes, a little."

"Shall I send for the doctor?"

"No; I am subject to these attacks."

"What can I do for Monsieur?"

He ordered his daily bath, eggs for his breakfast, and tea. But toward one o'clock he was seized with such a violent sensation of ennui that he thought he must get up. Elisabeth, ceaselessly summoned by a whim of the sham invalid, anxious, distressed, wishful to be of use and to suggest something that would do him good, seeing him nervous and restless, offered to read to him, blushing rosy red at her own audacity.

"Can you read well?" he asked.

"Yes, Monsieur, at school I always got prizes every year for reading; and I read many novels through to *maman*—I can remember only their names now."

He felt curious to see, so he sent her to the atelier to fetch his favorite—*Manon Lescaut*. She helped him to sit up in bed, put two pillows behind his back, took a chair and began. She read well, being endowed with a gift of clear enunciation and intelligent expression. The story interested her from the beginning, and she showed so much feeling

as she read it that he made her stop often to talk to her and question her.

Through the open window came the noise of the rushing water mingled with the song of the nightingales and the odors of flowers and trees. André looked at the young girl, whose shining eyes followed the story from page to page. She answered his questions with a comprehension of tenderness and passion—a just comprehension but one modified by her ignorance. He thought to himself: "She would become very witty and intelligent, this little girl, if she were educated."

The feminine charm noticed in her already by him was beneficial to him this warm and quiet afternoon and mingled itself in his mind with the mysterious and powerful charm of that Manon who arouses in our hearts the most peculiar image of any woman created by the human imagination.

He was lulled by her voice, entranced by that well-known but ever new story; and he dreamed of a mistress, capricious and captivating like De Grieux's, unfaithful yet constant, human and tempting even in the midst of her terrible faults, created to evoke in a man all that he was capable of feeling —tenderness and rage, love and passionate hatred, jealousy and desire.

Ah! if she whom he had left had only felt within herself the voluptuous and perfidious love of that passion-provoking courtesan, perhaps he never would have left her! Manon deceived her lover, but she loved him: she lied to him, but she gave herself to him.

After this day of idleness Mariolle sank, when night came, into a sort of revery in which all women appeared confused together. Having been perfectly

inactive since the evening before, his slumber was light: he was awakened by an unaccustomed noise. Once or twice before, during the night, he had fancied he heard soft footsteps and movements in the rooms below: not in the rooms immediately beneath him, but in the little rooms next the kitchen, the laundry and the bathroom, but had paid no attention. To-night, however, tired of being in bed, incapable of sleep, he strained his ears and thought he discerned unusual rustlings and moving about. So he decided to go and investigate. He lit his candle and looked at the clock: ten o'clock. He dressed, put a revolver in his pocket, and descended with infinite precaution. When he entered the kitchen, he saw to his astonishment that the fire was alight. For a moment he heard no noise; but, waiting, fancied he detected a slight sound coming from the bathroom, a little whitewashed room containing only a bath.

He went to the door, turned the handle noiselessly, then, pushing the door open, suddenly perceived stretched on the surface of the water, the arms floating, the prettiest female form he had ever beheld. She uttered a cry, horror-stricken, unable to escape!

Mariolle knelt at the edge of the bath, devouring her with his eyes, his lips seeking hers. She understood, and, suddenly raising her streaming arms, Elisabeth clasped them around the neck of her master.

CHAPTER XIII

THE SIREN SINGS AGAIN

WHEN, carrying in the tea, she appeared before him next morning and their eyes met, she began to tremble so violently that the cup and saucer and sugar-bowl knocked together several times. Mariolle went toward her, took the tray out of her hands, putting it on the table, and said to her as she lowered her eyelids:

"Look at me, *petite.*"

She looked up at him, her lashes wet with tears.

"I don't want you to cry," he said. As he clasped her to him he felt her shiver from head to foot, murmuring: "Oh, *mon Dieu!*" He saw that it was not sorrow, regret, or remorse that made her utter these words, but happiness, pure happiness. He experienced a strange content, physical rather than moral, in feeling nestling on his bosom this little person who truly loved him. He thanked her for her love just as a wounded beggar at the road-

side would thank a woman who gave him alms: he thanked her with all that heart famished by the indifference of another woman, and lacerated by its futile throbbings. Looking at her, pale and sorrowful, her eyes ardent with love, he said to himself: "How beautiful she is! How quickly a woman becomes transfigured when she fulfils the purpose of her existence, following the desires of her soul or the needs of her life!"

"Sit down," he said to her.

She sat down. He took her hands, her poor working-girl hands, now become white and delicate so as to please him, and very gently and with tact he spoke of the attitude they were to henceforth assume toward each other. She was no longer his servant, but would have to retain the appearance of being so, in order to avoid scandal. She would live in the house with him as a housekeeper and would read a great deal to him—this occupation would furnish an excuse for her new position. In a short time, when she was fully established as his reader, she would eat at his table.

When he had finished she answered him simply:

"No, Monsieur, I am, and I shall continue to be, your servant. I don't want any gossip to arise, and I am anxious that what has passed shall remain unknown."

She would not yield the point, although he insisted a good deal, and when he had drunk his tea she carried away the tray, followed by his tender glance. When she had gone he thought:

"This is a woman; all women are equal when they please us. I have made my servant my mistress. Already pretty, she may become charming: anyhow, she is younger and fresher than society

women and *cocottes*. What does it matter, after all? Are not many celebrated actresses the daughters of concierges, yet they are received as ladies, adored as if they were heroines of romance, and princes treat them like sovereigns. Is it on account of their talent, which is in many cases doubtful, or their beauty, very often open to question? No. But a woman takes always the position she is able to command for herself by the illusion she produces."

That day he took a long walk, and, although the same pain gnawed constantly at his heart and his legs were heavy as if grief had destroyed all the springs of his energy, there was existent in him a cheerfulness like the singing of a little bird. He felt less alone, less lost and deserted. The forest appeared less vast, lonely, and silent; and he returned at night looking forward to seeing her smiling, her eyes full of tenderness at his entrance.

For about a month their life was idyllic, by the side of the little river. Mariolle was loved as it falls to the lot of few men to be, with an animal and unreasoning love like that of a mother for her child, a dog for his master. He was everything to her, the earth and heaven, pleasure and happiness. He responded to all her naïve and ardent caresses, giving her in a kiss the full measure of ecstasy she was capable of feeling. He was all that existed for her now in her soul, her body; her heart intoxicated now as a young man is intoxicated when he drinks for the first time. He went to sleep in her arms, he awoke aroused by her caresses: he accepted this abandonment of herself to their mutual passion, feeling that he was drinking in love at its true source —the lips of nature.

Nevertheless, he remained sad and depressed. His little mistress pleased him, but he missed the other. And when he went for walks in the meadows along the banks of the Loing he would ask himself: "How is it that this dark cloud does not pass away?" and the recollection of Paris would haunt him so persistently that he would turn back and go home so as no longer to be alone.

Then he would go and lie in the hammock, and Elisabeth, sitting on a folding chair, would read to him. Even while listening to and looking at her, he would recall the evenings spent alone in the salon with Madame de Burne, chatting with her. Then an overwhelming desire to weep would beset him: his eyelids would become wet, and so intense a regret would tug at his heart that he felt as if he must depart immediately to return to Paris, or go away forever.

Seeing him gloomy and depressed, Elisabeth asked him:

"Are you in pain? I feel that you have tears in your eyes."

"Kiss me, little one: you would not understand."

She kissed him, feeling uneasy, suspecting some story that she had not heard; and he, soothed by her caresses a little, thought: "Ah! what a woman would be created in the combination of these two, uniting the affection of the one with the charm of the other. How is it that one never finds the realization of one's ideal—never attains higher than the 'almost'?" He mused vaguely, lulled by the monotonous sound of her voice, to which he was not listening, thinking of all that had allured and vanquished him in the mistress he had forsaken. He

said to himself, under the obsession of her memory, of her imaginary presence by which he was haunted as men beset by visions are by phantoms: "Am I fated never to be delivered from her?"

He began again to take long walks, to wander about the forest, with the vague hope of losing her somewhere, at the bottom of a ravine, behind a rock, in some thicket, like a man who, in order to rid himself of some unfortunate dog which he is reluctant to kill, will try to lose him on a journey.

One day in one of these walks he returned by the country of the beeches. By this time it was a gloomy forest, almost dark with the impenetrable foliage. He walked under the immense vault, formed by the overarching branches, regretting the scanty verdure of the spring, so penetrated by the golden sunbeams sifting through, and, as he turned into a narrow path, he stopped struck with astonishment before two trees entangled in each other's embrace. No more vivid symbol of his love had ever met his eyes: a beautiful and vigorous beech strangling a tall oak tree.

Like a desperate lover with a powerful but tortured body, the beech threw two formidable arms around the trunk of the oak, closing them around it. The other, held in this manner, raised high in the heavens its proud head, as if in disdain. But, in spite of this flight toward space, this haughty aloofness, it bore in its trunk two great scars, deep and long, that had long ago cicatrized. The branches beneath the scars had become an integral part of the tree, and the two, oak and beech, united forever, mingled their sap, and in the veins of the outraged tree it mounted to the great high top in the waving leaves.

Mariolle sat down so as to look at them for a long time. The sight of these trees appeared in the sight of his morbid soul a true symbol of his love—these two wrestlers motionless in the heart of the forest.

Then he got up and set off sadder than ever. Suddenly, as he went along, his eyes bent on the ground, he saw hidden in the grass, dirty with mud and the rain of weeks ago, a telegram lost or thrown away by some passer-by. He stopped. What sweet or painful message had the rumpled blue paper carried to some heart?

He could not help picking it up; with curious hands he unfolded it. It was almost illegible, but he made out this much of the writing: "Come . . . at four . . . me . . ." The names had been effaced by the wet.

Recollections both cruel and delicious arose to his mind, of all the despatches he had received from her—now to appoint the time of the rendezvous—now to tell him that she could not come. Never had any object raised such emotion in his heart, made him tremble so violently, made his poor heart stop and bound again like the sight of these blissful or desolating despatches. He felt almost prostrated with woe at the idea that never again would he receive one from her. Again he asked himself what could have happened to her since he left her. Had she suffered, regretted the friend driven away by her indifference, or was she simply wounded in her vanity? His desire to find out became so violent, so insistent, that an audacious idea came to him. He went to Fontainebleau and found out the telegraph office. His soul was shaken by vacillation and anxiety; but a force seemed to be dominating

him—an irresistible force emanating from his heart.

He took with a trembling hand a form from the table, and, after writing the name and address of Madame de Burne, wrote the following message:

"I want so much to know what you are thinking of me. I can forget nothing.

"Montigny." ANDRÉ MARIOLLE.

He went out afterward, took a carriage, and went back to Montigny troubled and tormented at what he had done, regretting it already.

He had calculated that if she vouchsafed an answer he would get a letter in two days; but he did not leave his cottage till the next day, fearing that a dispatch might come. He was swinging in the hammock between the yews at about three the next afternoon when Elisabeth came to tell him that a lady wished to speak to him.

The shock was so great that he felt a short sensation of choking, and he went toward the house, his legs shaking and his heart palpitating. He did not think, however, that it could be she. When he opened the door of the salon, Madame de Burne, seated on a sofa, rose and, smiling a rather reserved smile, a slight constraint visible in her face and attitude, held out her hand to him, saying:

"I have come to get some news of you, the telegram not having given complete details."

He had grown so pale at seeing her that her eyes shone with joy at perceiving it; and he remained so oppressed with emotion that he could not speak for some time and could only hold to his lips the hand she held out to him.

"*Dieu!* how good you are!" said he at last.

"No, but I do not forget my friends, and I worry about them."

She looked him full in the face with that first glance of a woman that takes all in, penetrates every thought to its source, and brushes away all disguises. She was no doubt satisfied, for her face cleared and she smiled.

"Your hermitage is pretty," she said. "Are you happy here?"

"No, Madame."

"Is it possible! In this pretty country near the lovely forest and on the bank of this charming little river! You ought to be quiet and absolutely happy here."

"No, Madame."

"Why not?"

"Because one does not forget."

"Is it indispensable that you should forget something so as to be happy?"

"Yes, Madame."

"May I ask what?"

"You know."

"And what then?"

"I am perfectly miserable."

"I guessed that when I received your telegram," she answered, "and that is why I came; with the determination to go away at once if I were mistaken." After a short pause she added: "Since I am not returning immediately, may I go over your place? There is a little path between yews there that looks very delightful—it must be cooler there than in the salon."

They went out. She wore a mauve toilet that harmonized so exquisitely with the verdure of the

trees and the blueness of the sky that she bewildered him as much as would an apparition; looking so pretty in a new and alluring manner. Her long, supple waist, her delicate and fresh face, the blond fire of her hair, under a large mauve hat that formed a nimbus around a long ostrich plume surrounding it, her thin arms with the two hands crossed in front carrying her closed umbrella, and her bearing, rather upright and proud, brought into this little rustic garden something abnormal, exotic, unexpected, the bizarre suggestion of some figure out of a story, a dream, a Watteau picture; a creation evolved from the brain of a poet or a painter, to take an excursion into the country to show, at the bidding of a sudden caprice, how beautiful she was. Mariolle, in looking at her, quivering with all his revived passion, recalled the two peasant women he had seen when he was walking through Montigny. She asked him: "Who is that young person who opened the door to me?"

"My servant."

"She does not look like a servant."

"No. She is extremely nice."

"Where did you get her?"

"Quite near here, in a hotel frequented by artists, where the guests were seeking to attack her virtue."

"Which you preserved?"

"Which I preserved," he answered, reddening.

"To your own advantage, perhaps?"

"To my own advantage, certainly, for I much prefer seeing a pretty face to an ugly one about my house."

"That is the only feeling with which she has inspired you?"

" She perhaps inspired me with an irresistible desire to see you again, for any woman who attracts my eyes, if only for a second, sends my thoughts back to you."

" That is a very skilful way of getting out of it. Does she love her preserver? "

He reddened still more painfully. Like a flash, the idea came to him that jealousy is a good stimulant for the heart, and he determined to utter only a half-lie. So he replied hesitatingly:

" I don't know anything about that. It is possible. She is very attentive to me and looks well after me."

An imperceptible annoyance forced Madame de Burne to murmur:

" And you? "

He fixed his eyes, burning with love, on her, and answered:

" Nothing could tempt me from you."

This was again very skilful, but she no longer thought of that, so much his utterance seemed to her the expression of an indubitable truth. How could a woman like her doubt such an avowal? She certainly did not doubt it, and, satisfied, she worried herself no more about Elisabeth.

They seated themselves on two folding chairs in the shadow of the yews, above the flowing water.

" What could you have thought of me? " he asked.

" That you were very unhappy."

" Through my fault or yours? "

" Through our fault. Then, knowing you to be very excitable, very intense, it struck me that the most sensible thing to do would be to let you come to yourself. And so I waited."

"What were you waiting for."

"A word from you. I received it, and here I am. Now let us talk like sensible people. So you still love me? I do not ask you this as a coquette, but in the character of a friend."

"I love you still."

"And what are your intentions?"

"I do not know. I am in your hands."

"Oh, I—I have very definite ideas, but I shall not impart them until I know yours. Let us speak of you, of what took place in your heart and in your spirit since you went away."

"I thought of you and did scarcely anything else."

"Yes, but how, in what way, and with what result?"

He related his determination to be cured of his love for her, his flight, his arrival in the great forest where he saw nothing around him but her; told of his days haunted by memories, his nights made wretched by jealousy. He told all in good faith, except the love of Elisabeth, whose name was not mentioned.

Madame de Burne listened, assured of the truth of all he said, more certain of it through the belief she entertained in the power she wielded over Mariolle than assured by the sincerity of his voice and manner; she was overjoyed at her triumph at receiving him back, for she really was sincerely fond of him.

Then he lamented anew over this hopeless situation, and growing excited in speaking about what he had undergone, he reproached her with impassioned, poetic enthusiasm, but showing no rancor or

bitterness, with the incapacity for love with which she was cursed.

"Some are denied the gift of pleasing," he said, in ending. "To you the gift of loving is denied."

She interrupted him, animatedly full of reasons and argument.

"At least I have the gift of constancy," she broke in. "Would you be less unhappy if after having loved you for ten months I were to-day in love with another?"

"Is it impossible for a woman to love only one man?"

"One cannot love at will; one can always be faithful," she answered quickly. "Do you imagine that the delirious exaltation of the senses can last for several years? With the majority of women, passionate women, who take caprices lasting a longer or a shorter time, life is nothing but a long romance; the heroes, the circumstances, the dénouements change; it is an amusement and a distraction for them, I must confess, for the emotions of the beginning, middle, and end are changed each time. But when it is finished it is finished—for the man. You understand?"

"Yes, that is true, to some extent. But I do not see your drift."

"It is this. No great, burning, torturing passion can exist for a long time—like yours from which you suffer. It is a phase which I have made very painful to you, I know and I feel, through the poverty of my tenderness, and my incapability of expansion. But this phase of feeling you are undergoing will pass—it cannot last eternally."

She stopped. He asked anxiously:

"And then?"

" Then I consider that for a calm and reasonable woman like me you will make a very agreeable lover, for you have plenty of tact. But you would be an atrocious husband. However, there are not, there cannot be, any good husbands."

He asked, surprised, a little vexed:

" Why keep a lover who no longer loves you and whom you do not love? "

" I do love in my own fashion, *mon ami,*" she answered. " I love calmly, but I love."

" You have, at least," he replied resignedly, " the desire that one should love you, and that he should show that he loves you."

" That's true," she answered. " I adore that. But my heart needs a secret companion. That vain love of public homage does not prevent me from being faithful and devoted and believing that I am capable of bestowing upon a man something of myself that no other could have—my loyal affection, the secret attachment of my heart, the absolute and secret confidence of my soul; and, in return, receiving from him with all his lover-like tenderness the rare and sweet feeling that I am not alone. It is not, perhaps, love as you understand it; but it is worth something."

He bent toward her, trembling with feeling and stammering:

" Are you willing that I should be that man? "

" Yes, a little later, when you are suffering less. In the meantime, prepare yourself to bear pain through your companionship with me from time to time. That will pass over. Since you experience pain in any case, it is better to feel it near me than far away, is it not? "

Her smile seemed to say: " Do have a little

confidence in me," and as she saw him palpitating with passion, she felt throughout her being a sort of contentment that made her happy after her own fashion; just as a hunter is happy when a long-desired prey is struggling in the trap he set.

"When do you return?" she asked.

"Why, to-morrow," he answered.

"All right—to-morrow let it be. Will you take dinner with me?"

"Yes, Madame."

"I must go soon," she remarked, looking at the watch set in the handle of her umbrella.

"Oh! Why so soon?"

"Because I must catch the five o'clock train; some people are coming to dinner: the Princess de Malten, Bernhaus, Lamarthe, Massival, Maltry, and a new man, Monsieur de Charlaine, the explorer, just back from the upper Cambodia after a wonderful journey. He is the rage just now."

Mariolle experienced a sudden pang at his heart. All the names she had mentioned, one after the other, hurt him like the stings of a wasp. They contained poison.

"Then," said he, "shall we leave at once, and take a drive through the forest?"

"That will be very nice. But won't you offer me first a cup of tea and some toast?"

When it was time to serve the tea, Elisabeth could not be found.

"She has gone out to take a walk," the cook said.

Madame de Burne was not surprised at this. What fear, anyhow, could this maidservant inspire in her now? They got into the landau waiting before the door, and Mariolle made the driver take a

road which was longer, but which took in the Gorge-aux-Loups. When they were bowling along under the high foliage, enjoying its calm shade, breathing in its embracing freshness, she said, struck by the inexpressible sensation with which the powerful and mysterious beauty of the earth influences the flesh through the eyes: "*Dieu!* How nice it is here! How beautiful and restful!"

She drew a long breath with the emotion of a shriven communicant, mingled with happiness, feeling penetrated with languor and tender yearning. She placed her hand on that of André.

But he thought: "Ah! yes. Nature again! Just as at Mont St. Michel." For before his eyes, in a vision, passed a train going to Paris. He went with her as far as the station. In leaving him she said: "To-morrow, then, at eight."

"To-morrow at eight, Madame."

Smiling radiantly, she left him; and he returned home in the landau, satisfied, happy, but always possessed by that haunting uneasiness, for the end was not yet.

But why struggle? It was of no use. She attracted him by a charm which he could not understand, stronger than any power he had ever encountered. To fly from her availed nothing; it only made him suffer intolerably, while, if he were patient and resigned, he would have from her at least all that she promised, for she did not lie.

The horses trotted under the trees, and he remembered that all through their interview she had never once had the idea, the impulse, to tender him her lips. She was always the same; nothing would change her, and he would perhaps always suffer in the same manner through her. The recollection

of the unhappy hours he had passed in the unbearable certainty that he could never touch her heart darkened his soul once more, made him dread and foresee similar misery in the future. However, he was determined to suffer all rather than to lose her again; resigned to that eternal longing that had become a sort of fierce appetite, never to be assuaged, a fire that consumed his flesh.

One of those tempests of feeling so often felt by him on his way home from Auteuil was beginning to rage in his heart, when, all at once, the thought of Elisabeth recurred to him; Elisabeth waiting, fresh and young and pretty, her heart full of love for him. Soon he would hold her in his arms, and with closed eyes would deceive himself as one deceives others, confusing in the intoxication of his embrace the one who loved him with the one whom he loved, and would thus possess both. It is true that at this moment he felt attracted by her; a grateful attachment of the soul and body bound him to her, growing out of the love he saw he had inspired in her and the pleasure they had shared together. This child whom he had lured from the straight way would she not be, for his arid and withering love, the little spring discovered at nightfall, the hope of fresh water that sustains the traveler wandering in the desert?

But when he got home and found that the young girl had not come back he felt anxious, and said to the other servant:

"You are sure she went out?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

He went out too, hoping that he might meet her. When he had gone a few steps, before turning into the long street that went along the valley, he saw

an old church, wide and low, surmounted by a short steeple, squatting on a small eminence, and from this overlooking the village, like a hen watching over her chickens.

A suspicion, a presentiment, impelled him to enter. Who could fathom the strange divinations dictated by the heart of a woman? What had she heard? What had she understood? Where would she be more likely to go than to the church, if an inkling of the truth had penetrated her mind?

The interior of the church was very dark, for night was falling. Only the little lamp was visible at the end of its thread, revealing in the tabernacle the ideal presence of the Divine Consoler. Mariolle passed with light steps along the benches; when he drew near the choir he saw a woman kneeling, her face in her hands. There was no one else in the church. He approached, and seeing it was Elisabeth, touched her on the shoulder. She started violently and turned her head. Then he saw that she was crying.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

"I understood," she answered. "You are here because she made you unhappy; and she came to fetch you."

He stammered, overcome by the sorrow that he now felt in his turn.

"You are mistaken, *petite,*" he replied. "I am, it is true, returning to Paris, but I shall take you with me."

"Oh, no! It is not true! It is not true!" she cried, incredulous.

"I swear it to you," he said solemnly.

"When?"

"To-morrow."

Beginning to sob low, she moaned: "*Mon Dieu! mon Dieu!*" He took her by the waist and led her out, made her go down the hill, now covered by night, and when they had reached the river-bank he seated her on the grass and sat beside her. He listened to her heart beating and her breath catching, and, struck with remorse, straining her to him, he spoke tender words in her ear, such as he had never uttered to her before. Softened by pity and burning with desire, he scarcely departed from the truth and he did not deceive her. Astonished at what he felt, he asked himself how it was possible that, still thrilling from the presence of that other whose slave he must ever remain, he could thus tremble with passion and emotion in consoling this girl's grief.

He promised to love her well—he did not say "love" *tout court*—and said he would give her, quite near his own home, a pretty apartment handsomely furnished and a maid to wait on her. She grew calmer in listening to him, reassured little by little, feeling confidence in him inspired by the sincerity of his voice. Convinced at last and dazzled by the vision held out before her eyes of being a lady in her turn, the little friend of so rich and good a man, she grew carried away by gratitude and pride, mingling with her love for André. Throwing her arms around his neck, she murmured:

"I love you so much; you are all I have in the world."

He answered, returning her caresses: "Dear little girl!"

Already she had almost forgotten the existence of that stranger whose appearance had that afternoon caused her such sharp grief. But a sort of

half-conscious doubt floated in her mind, and she whispered in a coaxing voice:

"Truly you will always love me as you love me here?"

He answered firmly:

"I shall always love you as I love you here!"

THE SNIPE

OLD Baron des Ravots had for forty years been the champion sportsman of his province. But a stroke of paralysis had kept him in his chair for the last five or six years. He could no longer shoot pigeons from the window of his drawing-room, or from the top of his high doorsteps.

He spent his time in reading.

He was a good-natured business man, who had much of the literary spirit of a former century. He delighted in anecdotes, little *risqué* anecdotes, and also in true stories of events that happened in his neighborhood. As soon as a friend came to see him he asked:

"Well, anything new?"

And he knew how to worm out information like an examining lawyer.

On sunny days he had his large reclining-chair,

similar to a bed, wheeled to the hall door. A man-servant behind him held his guns, loaded them, and handed them to his master. Another valet, hidden in the bushes, let fly a pigeon from time to time at irregular intervals, so that the Baron should be unprepared and be always on the watch.

And from morning till night he fired at the birds, much annoyed if he were taken by surprise, and laughing till he cried when the animal fell straight to the earth, or turned over in some comical and unexpected manner. He would turn to the man who loaded the gun and say, choking with laughter:

"Did that get him, Joseph? Did you see how he fell?" Joseph invariably replied:

"Oh, Monsieur le Baron never misses them."

In autumn, when the shooting season opened, he invited his friends as he had formerly invited them, and he loved to hear them firing in the distance. He counted the shots, and was pleased when they followed each other rapidly. In the evening he made each guest give a faithful account of his day. They sat three hours at table telling about their sport.

They were strange and improbable adventures, in which the romancing spirit of the sportsmen delighted. Some of them were memorable stories and were repeated regularly. The story of a rabbit that the little Vicomte de Bourril had missed in his vestibule convulsed them anew with laughter each year. Every five minutes a fresh speaker would say:

"I heard *Birr! Birr!* and a magnificent covey rose at ten paces from me. I aimed: *Pif Paf!* And I saw a shower, a veritable shower of birds. There were seven of them!"

Then the guests went into raptures, amazed, but reciprocally credulous.

But there was an old custom in the house called "the story of the snipe."

Whenever this queen of birds was in season the same ceremony took place at each dinner. As they worshiped this incomparable bird, each guest ate one every night, but the heads were left in the dish.

Then the Baron, acting the part of a bishop, had a plate brought to him containing a little fat, and he carefully anointed the precious heads, holding them by the tip of the slender, needle-like beak. A lighted candle was placed beside him, and every one was silent in an anxiety of expectation.

Then he took one of the heads thus prepared, thrust a pin through it, and stuck the pin on a cork, keeping the whole contrivance steady by means of little crossed sticks; then he carefully placed this object on the neck of a bottle in the manner of a tourniquet.

All the guests counted in a loud tone: "One, two, three."

And the Baron, with a fillip of the finger, made this toy whirl round.

The guest to whom the long beak pointed when the head stopped became the possessor of all the heads, which made his neighbors look askance.

He took them one by one and toasted them over the candle. The grease sputtered, the roasting flesh smoked, and the lucky winner ate the head, holding it by the beak and uttering exclamations of joy.

As he began on each head the diners, raising their glasses, drank to his health.

When he had finished the last head he was obliged, at the Baron's orders, to tell an anecdote to compensate the disappointed ones.

Here follow some of the stories.

THAT PIG OF A MORIN

I

"THERE, my friend," I said to Labarbe, "you have just repeated those five words, *that pig of a Morin.* Why on earth do I never hear Morin's name mentioned without his being called *a pig?*"

Labarbe, who is a deputy, looked at me with his owl-like eyes, and said: "Do you mean to say that you do not know Morin's story and you come from La Rochelle?" I was obliged to declare that I did not know Morin's story, so Labarbe rubbed his hands and began his recital.

"You knew Morin, did you not, and you remember his large linen-draper's shop on the Quai de la Rochelle?"

"Yes, perfectly."

"Well, then. You must know that in 1862 or

'63 Morin went to spend a fortnight in Paris for pleasure, or for his pleasures, but under the pretext of renewing his stock, and you also know what a fortnight in Paris means to a country shopkeeper; it fires his blood. The theater every evening, women's dresses rustling up against you, and continual excitement; one goes almost mad with it. One sees nothing but dancers in tights, actresses in very low dresses, round legs, fat shoulders, all nearly within reach of one's hands, without daring or being able to touch them, and one scarcely tastes food. When one leaves the city, his heart is still all in a flutter, and his mind still exhilarated by a sort of longing for kisses which tickles the lips.

"Morin was in that condition when he took his ticket for La Rochelle by the eight-forty night express. As he was walking up and down the waiting-room at the station he stopped suddenly in front of a young lady who was kissing an old one. She had her veil up, and Morin murmured with delight: 'By Jove, what a pretty woman!'

"When she had said 'Good-by' to the old lady, she went into the waiting-room, and Morin followed her; then she went on the platform and Morin still followed her; then she got into an empty carriage, and he again followed her. There were very few travelers on the express. The engine whistled, and the train started. They were alone. Morin devoured her with his eyes. She appeared to be about bold look. She wrapped a railway rug round her, and stretched herself on the seat to sleep.

"Morin asked himself: 'I wonder who she is?' And a thousand conjectures, a thousand projects went through his head. He said to himself: 'So many adventures are told as happening on railway

journeys that this may be one that is going to present itself to me. Who knows? A piece of good luck like that happens very suddenly, and perhaps I need only be a little venturesome. Was it not Danton who said: "Audacity, more audacity, and always audacity"? If it was not Danton it was Mirabeau, but that does not matter. But then I have no audacity, and that is the difficulty. Oh! If one only knew, if one could only read people's minds! I will bet that every day one passes by magnificent opportunities without knowing it, though a gesture would be enough to let me know her mind.'

"Then he imagined to himself combinations which conducted him to triumph. He pictured some chivalrous deed, or merely some slight service which he rendered her, a lively, gallant conversation which ended in a declaration.

"But he could find no opening, had no pretext, and he waited for some fortunate circumstance, with his heart beating and his mind topsy-turvy. The night passed and the pretty girl still slept, while Morin was meditating his own fall. The day broke and soon the first ray of sunlight appeared in the sky, a long, clear ray which shone on the face of the sleeping girl and woke her. She sat up, looked at the country, then at Morin, and smiled. She smiled like a happy woman, with an engaging and bright look, and Morin trembled. Certainly that smile was intended for him; it was discreet invitation, the signal which he was waiting for. That smile meant to say: 'How stupid, what a ninny, what a dolt, what a donkey you are, to have sat there on your seat like a post all night!

"'Just look at me, am I not charming? And you have sat like that for the whole night, when

you have been alone with a pretty woman, you great simpleton!'

"She was still smiling as she looked at him; she even began to laugh; and he lost his head trying to find something suitable to say, no matter what. But he could think of nothing, nothing, and then, seized with a coward's courage, he said to himself: 'So much the worse, I will risk everything,' and suddenly, without the slightest warning, he went toward her, his arms extended, his lips protruding, and, seizing her in his arms, he kissed her.

"She sprang up immediately with a bound, crying out: 'Help! help!' and screaming with terror, and then she opened the carriage door and waved her arm out, mad with terror, and tried to jump out, while Morin, who was almost distracted and feeling sure that she would throw herself out, held her by the skirt and stammered: 'Oh, Madame!'

"The train slackened speed, and then stopped. Two guards rushed up at the young woman's frantic signals. She threw herself into their arms, stammering: 'That man wanted . . . wanted . . . to . . . to . . .' And then she fainted.

"They were at Mauzé station, and the gendarme on duty arrested Morin. When the victim of his indiscreet admiration had regained her consciousness, she made her charge against him, and the police drew it up. The poor linen-draper did not reach home till night, with a prosecution hanging over him for an outrage to morals in a public place.

II

"At that time I was editor of the *Fanal des Charentes,* and I used to meet Morin every day

at the Café du Commerce, and the day after his adventure he came to see me, as he did not know what to do. I did not hide my opinion from him, but said to him: 'You are no better than a pig. No decent man behaves like that.'

"He cried. His wife had given him a beating, and he foresaw his trade ruined, his name dragged through the mire and dishonored, his friends scandalized and taking no notice of him. In the end he excited my pity, and I sent for my colleague Rivet, a jocular but very sensible little man, to give us his advice.

"He advised me to see the Public Prosecutor, who was a friend of mine, and so I sent Morin home, and went to call on the magistrate. He told me that the woman who had been insulted was a young lady, Mademoiselle Henriette Bonnel, who had just received her certificate as governess in Paris, and spent her holidays with her uncle and aunt, who were very respectable tradespeople in Mauzé, and what made Morin's case all the more serious was that the uncle had lodged a complaint; for the public official had consented to let the matter drop if this complaint were withdrawn, so we must try to get him to do this.

"I went back to Morin's and found him in bed, ill with excitement and distress. His wife, a tall raw-boned woman with a beard, was abusing him continually, and she showed me into the room, shouting at me: 'So you have come to see that pig of a Morin. Well, there he is, the darling!' And she planted herself in front of the bed, with her hands on her hips. I told him how matters stood, and he begged me to go and see the girl's uncle and aunt. It was a delicate mission, but I undertook it, and

the poor devil never ceased repeating: 'I assure you I did not even kiss her; no, not even that. I will take my oath to it!'

"I replied: 'It is all the same; you are nothing but a pig.' And I took a thousand francs which he gave me to employ them as I thought best, but as I did not care to venture to her uncle's house alone, I begged Rivet to go with me, which he agreed to do on condition that we went immediately, for he had some urgent business at La Rochelle that afternoon. So two hours later we rang at the door of a pretty country house. An attractive girl came and opened the door to us, assuredly the young lady in question, and I said to Rivet, in a low voice: 'Confound it! I begin to understand Morin!'

"The uncle, Monsieur Tonnelet, subscribed to the *Fanal,* and was a fervent political co-religionist of ours. He received us with open arms and congratulated us and wished us joy; he was delighted at having the two editors in his house, and Rivet whispered to me: 'I think we shall be able to arrange the matter of that pig of a Morin.'

"The niece had left the room and I introduced the delicate subject. I waved the specter of scandal before his eyes; I accentuated the inevitable depreciation which the young lady would suffer if such an affair became known, for nobody would believe in a simple kiss; and the good man seemed undecided, but he could not make up his mind about anything without his wife, who would not be in until late that evening. But suddenly he uttered an exclamation of triumph: 'Look here, I have an excellent idea; I will keep you here to dine and sleep, and when my wife comes home I hope we can arrange matters.'

"Rivet resisted at first, but the wish to extri-

cate that pig of a Morin decided him, so we accepted the invitation, and the uncle got up radiant, called his niece, and proposed that we should take a stroll in his grounds, saying: 'We will leave serious matters until the morning.' Rivet and he began to talk politics, while I soon found myself lagging a little behind with the girl who was really charming—charming—and with the greatest precaution I began to speak to her about her adventure, and try to make her my ally. She did not, however, appear the least confused, and listened to me like a person who was enjoying the whole thing.

"I said to her: 'Just think, Mademoiselle, how unpleasant it will be for you. You will have to appear in court, to encounter malicious looks, to speak before everybody, and to recount that unfortunate occurrence in the railway carriage in public. Do you not think, between ourselves, that it would have been much better for you to put that dirty scoundrel back in his place without calling for assistance, and merely to change your carriage?' She began to laugh, and replied: 'What you say is quite true, but what could I do? I was frightened, and when one is frightened one does not stop to reason with one's self. As soon as I realized the situation I was very sorry that I had called out, but then it was too late. You must also remember that the idiot threw himself upon me like a madman, without saying a word and looking like a lunatic. I did not even know what he wanted of me.'

"She looked me full in the face without being nervous or intimidated, and I said to myself: 'She is a queer sort of girl, that: I can quite see how that pig Morin came to make a mistake,' and I went on jokingly: 'Come, Mademoiselle, confess that he

was excusable, for, after all, a man cannot find himself opposite such a pretty girl as you are without feeling a natural desire to kiss her.'

"'She laughed more than ever, and showed her teeth, and said: 'Between the desire and the act, Monsieur, there is room for respect.' It was an odd expression to use, although it was not very clear, and I asked abruptly: 'Well, now, suppose I were to kiss you, what would you do?' She stopped to look at me from head to foot, and then said calmly: 'Oh, you? That is quite another matter.'

"'I knew perfectly well, by Jove, that it was not the same thing at all, as everybody in the neighborhood called me 'handsome Labarbe'—I was thirty years old in those days—but I asked her: 'And why, pray?' She shrugged her shoulders and replied: 'Well! because you are not so stupid as he is.' And then she added, looking at me slyly: 'Nor so ugly, either.' And before she could make a movement to avoid me I had implanted a hearty kiss on her cheek. She sprang aside, but it was too late, and then she said: 'Well, you are not very bashful, either! But don't do that again.'

"'I put on a humble look, and said in a low voice: 'Oh, Mademoiselle! as for me, if I long for one thing more than another it is to be summoned before a magistrate for the same reason as Morin.'

"'' Why?' she asked. And, looking steadily at her, I replied: 'Because you are one of the most beautiful creatures living; because it would be an honor and a glory for me to have wished to offer you violence, and because people would have said, after seeing you: "Well, Labarbe has richly deserved what he has got, but he is a lucky fellow, all the same."'"

" She began to laugh heartily again, and said: ' How funny you are! ' And she had not finished the word ' funny ' before I had her in my arms and was kissing her ardently wherever I could find a place, on her forehead, on her eyes, on her lips occasionally, on her cheeks, all over her head, some part of which she was obliged to leave exposed, in spite of herself, to defend the others; but at last she managed to release herself, blushing and angry. ' You are very unmannerly, Monsieur,' she said, ' and I am sorry I listened to you.'

" I took her hand in some confusion, and stammered out: ' I beg your pardon. I beg your pardon, Mademoiselle. I have offended you; I have acted like a brute! Do not be angry with me for what I have done. If you knew. . . .' I vainly sought for some excuse, and in a few moments she said: ' There is nothing for me to know, Monsieur.' But I had found something to say, and I cried: ' Mademoiselle, I love you! '

" She was really surprised and raised her eyes to look at me, and I went on: ' Yes, Mademoiselle, and pray listen to me. I do not know Morin, and I do not care anything about him. It does not matter to me the least if he is committed for trial and locked up meanwhile. I saw you here last year, and I was so taken with you that the thought of you has never left me since, and it does not matter to me whether you believe me or not. I thought you adorable, and the remembrance of you took such a hold on me that I longed to see you again, and so I made use of that fool Morin as a pretext, and here I am. Circumstances have made me exceed the due limits of respect, and I can only beg you to pardon me.'

" She read the truth in my looks and was ready to smile again; then she murmured: ' You humbug!' But I raised my hand and said in a sincere voice (and I really believe that I was sincere): ' I swear to you that I am speaking the truth,' and she replied quite simply: ' Really? '

" We were alone, quite alone, as Rivet and her uncle had disappeared down a side walk, and I made her a real declaration of love, while I squeezed and kissed her hands, and she listened to it as to something new and agreeable, without exactly knowing how much of it she was to believe, while in the end I felt agitated, and at last really myself believed what I said. I was pale, anxious, and trembling, and I gently put my arm round her waist and spoke to her softly, whispering into the little curls over her ears. She seemed in a trance, so absorbed in thought was she.

" Then her hand touched mine, and she pressed it, and I gently squeezed her waist with a trembling, and gradually firmer, grasp. She did not move now, and I touched her cheeks with my lips, and suddenly without seeking them mine met hers. It was a long, long kiss, and it would have lasted longer still if I had not heard a *hm! hm!* just behind me, at which she made her escape through the bushes, and turning round I saw Rivet coming toward me, and, standing in the middle of the path, he said without even smiling: ' So that is the way in which you settle the affair of that pig Morin.' And I replied conceitedly: ' One does what one can, my dear fellow. But what about the uncle? How have you got on with him? I will answer for the niece.' ' I have not been so fortunate with him,' he replied.

" Whereupon I took his arm and we went in.

III

" Dinner made me lose my head altogether. I sat beside her, and my hand continually met hers under the tablecloth, my foot touched hers, and our glances met.

" After dinner we took a walk by moonlight, and I whispered all the tender things I could think of to her. I held her close to me, kissed her every moment, while her uncle and Rivet were arguing as they walked in front of us. They went in, and soon a messenger brought a telegram from her aunt, saying that she would not return until the next morning at seven o'clock by the first train.

" ' Very well, Henriette,' her uncle said, ' go and show the gentlemen their rooms.' She showed Rivet his first, and he whispered to me: ' There was no danger of her taking us into yours first.' Then she took me to my room, and as soon as she was alone with me I took her in my arms again and tried to arouse her emotion, but when she saw the danger she escaped out of the room, and I retired, very much put out and excited and feeling rather foolish, for I knew that I should not sleep much, and I was wondering how I could have committed such a mistake, when there was a gentle knock at my door, and on my asking who was there a low voice replied: ' I.'

" I dressed myself quickly and opened the door, and she came in. ' I forgot to ask you what you take in the morning,' she said: ' chocolate, tea, or coffee? ' I put my arms round her impetuously and said, devouring her with kisses: ' I will take . . .'

" But she freed herself from my arms, blew out my candle and disappeared, and left me alone in the dark, furious, trying to find some matches, and not able to do so. At last I got some, and I went into the passage, feeling half mad, with my candlestick in my hand.

" What was I about to do? I did not stop to reason, I only wanted to find her, and I would. I went a few steps without reflecting, but then I suddenly thought: ' Suppose I should walk into the uncle's room, what should I say? ' . . . And I stood still, with my head a void and my heart beating. But in a few moments I thought of an answer: ' Of course, I shall say that I was looking for Rivet's room to speak to him about an important matter, and I began to inspect all the doors, trying to find hers, and at last I took hold of a handle at a venture, turned it and went in. . . . There was Henriette, sitting on her bed and looking at me in tears. So I gently turned the key, and going up to her on tiptoe, I said: ' I forgot to ask you for something to read, Mademoiselle. . . .'

" I was stealthily returning to my room when a rough hand seized me, and a voice—it was Rivet's —whispered in my ear: ' So you have not yet quite settled that affair of Morin's? '

" At seven o'clock the next morning Henriette herself brought me a cup of chocolate. I never have drunk anything like it, soft, velvety, perfumed, delicious. I could hardly take away my lips from the cup, and she had hardly left the room when Rivet came in. He seemed nervous and irritable, like a man who had not slept, and he said to me crossly: ' If you go on like this you will end by spoiling the affair of that pig of a Morin! '

" At eight o'clock the aunt arrived. Our discussion was very short, for they withdrew their complaint, and I left five hundred francs for the poor of the town. They wanted to keep us for the day, and they arranged an excursion to go and see some ruins. Henriette made signs to me to stay, behind her parents' backs, and I accepted, but Rivet was determined to go, and though I took him aside and begged and prayed him to do this for me, he appeared quite exasperated and kept saying to me: 'I have had enough of that pig Morin's affair.'

" Of course I was obliged to go also, and it was one of the hardest moments of my life. I could have gone on arranging that business as long as I lived, and when we were in the railway carriage, after shaking hands with her in silence, I said to Rivet: 'You are a mere brute!' And he replied: 'My dear fellow, you were beginning to annoy me confoundedly.'

" On getting to the *Fanal* office, I saw a crowd waiting for us, and as soon as they saw us they all exclaimed: 'Well, have you settled the affair of that pig of a Morin?' All La Rochelle was excited about it, and Rivet, who had got over his ill-humor on the journey, had great difficulty in keeping himself from laughing as he said: 'Yes, we have managed it, thanks to Labarbe.' And we went to Morin's.

" He was sitting in an easy-chair with mustard plasters on his legs and cold bandages on his head, nearly dead with misery. He was coughing with the short cough of a dying man, without any one knowing how he had caught it, and his wife looked at him like a tigress ready to eat him. As soon as he saw us he trembled so violently as to make his

hands and knees shake, so I said to him immediately: 'It is all settled, you dirty scamp, but don't do such a thing again.'

"He got up, choking, took my hands and kissed them as if they had belonged to a prince, cried, nearly fainted, embraced Rivet, and even kissed Madame Morin, who gave him such a push as to send him staggering back into his chair; but he never got over the blow: his mind had been too much upset. In all the country round, moreover, he was called nothing but 'that pig of a Morin,' and that epithet went through him like a sword-thrust every time he heard it. When a street boy called after him: 'Pig!' he turned his head instinctively. His friends also overwhelmed him with horrible jokes and used to ask him, whenever they were eating ham: 'Is it a bit of you?' He died two years later.

"As for myself, when I was a candidate for the Chamber of Deputies in 1875, I called on the new notary at Fousserre, Monsieur Belloncle, to solicit his vote, and a tall, handsome, and evidently wealthy lady received me. 'You do not know me again?' she said. And I stammered out: 'But . . . no . . . Madame.' 'Henriette Bonnel.' 'Ah!' And I felt myself turning pale, while she seemed perfectly at her ease, and looked at me with a smile.

"As soon as she had left me alone with her husband he took both my hands, and, squeezing them as if he meant to crush them, he said: 'I have been intending to go and see you for a long time, my dear sir, for my wife has very often talked to me about you. I know . . . yes, I know under what painful circumstances you made her acquaintance,

and I know also how perfectly you behaved, how full of delicacy, tact, and devotion you showed yourself in the affair. . . .' He hesitated, and then said in a lower tone, as if he had been saying something low and coarse . . . 'In the affair of that pig of a Morin.'"

A NORMANDY JOKE

IT was a wedding procession that was coming along the road between the tall trees that bounded the farms and cast their shadow on the road. At the head were the bride and groom, then the family, then the invited guests, and last of all the poor of the neighborhood. The village urchins who hovered about the narrow road like flies ran in and out of the ranks or climbed up the trees to see it better.

The bridegroom was a good-looking young fellow, Jean Patu, the richest farmer in the neighborhood, but he was, above all things, an ardent sportsman who seemed to take leave of his senses in order to satisfy that passion, and who spent large sums on his dogs, his keepers, his ferrets, and his guns. The bride, Rosalie Roussel, had been courted by all the

likely young fellows in the district, for they all thought her handsome, and they knew that she would have a good dowry. But she had chosen Patu; partly, perhaps, because she liked him better than she did the others, but still more, like a careful Normandy girl, because he had more crown pieces.

As they entered the white gateway of the husband's farm, forty shots resounded without their seeing those who fired, as they were hidden in the ditches. The noise seemed to please the men, who were slouching along heavily in their best clothes, and Patu left his wife, and running up to a farm servant whom he perceived behind a tree, took his gun and fired a shot himself, as frisky as a young colt. Then they went on, beneath the apple trees which were heavy with fruit, through the high grass and through the midst of the calves, who looked at them with their great eyes, got up slowly and remained standing, with their muzzles turned toward the wedding party.

The men became serious when they came within measurable distance of the wedding dinner. Some of them, the rich ones, had on tall, shining silk hats, which seemed altogether out of place there; others had old head-coverings with a long nap, which might have been taken for moleskin, while the humblest among them wore caps. All the women had on shawls, which they wore loosely on their backs, holding the tips ceremoniously under their arms. They were red, parti-colored, flaming shawls, and their brightness seemed to astonish the black fowls on the dung-heap, the ducks on the side of the pond, and the pigeons on the thatched roofs.

The extensive farm buildings seemed to be waiting there at the end of that archway of apple trees,

and a sort of vapor came out of open door and windows and an almost overwhelming odor of eatables was exhaled from the vast building, from all its openings and from its very walls. The string of guests extended through the yard; but when the foremost of them reached the house, they broke the chain and dispersed, while those behind were still coming in at the open gate. The ditches were now lined with urchins and curious poor people, and the firing did not cease, but came from every side at once, and a cloud of smoke, and that odor which has the same intoxicating effect as absinthe, blended with the atmosphere.

The women were shaking their dresses outside the door, to get rid of the dust, were undoing their cap-strings and pulling their shawls over their arms, and then they went into the house to lay them aside altogether for the time. The table was laid in the great kitchen that would hold a hundred persons; they sat down to dinner at two o'clock, and at eight o'clock they were still eating, and the men, in their shirt-sleeves, with their waistcoats unbuttoned and with red faces, were swallowing down the food and drink as if they had been whirlpools. The cider sparkled merrily, clear and golden in the large glasses, by the side of the dark, blood-colored wine, and between every dish they made the hole, the Normandy hole, with a glass of brandy, which inflamed the body and put foolish notions into the head. Low jokes were exchanged across the table until the whole arsenal of peasant wit was exhausted. For the last hundred years the same stories had served for similar occasions, and, although every one knew them, they still hit the mark and made both rows of guests roar with laughter.

At one end of the table four young fellows, who were neighbors, were preparing some practical jokes for the newly married couple, and they seemed to have got hold of a good one by the way they whispered and laughed, and suddenly one of them, profiting by a moment of silence, exclaimed: "The poachers will have a good time to-night, with this moon! . . . I say, Jean, you will not be looking at the moon, will you?" The bridegroom turned to him quickly and replied: "Only let them come, that's all!" But the other young fellow began to laugh, and said: "I do not think you will pay much attention to them!"

The whole table was convulsed with laughter, so that the glasses shook, but the bridegroom became furious at the thought that anybody would profit by his wedding to come and poach on his land, and repeated: "I only say—just let them come!"

Then there was a flood of talk with a double meaning which made the bride blush somewhat, although she was trembling with expectation; and when they had emptied the kegs of brandy they all went to bed. The young couple went into their own room, which was on the ground floor, as most rooms in farmhouses are. As it was very warm, they opened the window and closed the shutters. A small lamp in bad taste, a present from the bride's father, was burning on the chest of drawers, and the bed stood ready to receive the young people.

The young woman had already taken off her wreath and her dress, and she was in her petticoat, unlacing her boots, while Jean was finishing his cigar and looking at her out of the corners of his eyes. Suddenly, with a brusque movement, like a man who is about to set to work, he took off his

coat. She had already taken off her boots, and was now pulling off her stockings, and then she said to him: "Go and hide yourself behind the curtains while I get into bed."

He seemed as if he were about to refuse; but at last he did as she asked him, and in a moment she unfastened her petticoat, which slipped down her legs, fell at her feet, and lay on the ground. She left it there, stepped over it, and slipped into the bed, whose springs creaked beneath her weight. He immediately went up to the bed, and, stooping over his wife, he sought her lips, which she hid beneath the pillow, when a shot was heard in the distance, in the direction of the forest, as he thought.

He raised himself anxiously, with his heart beating, and running to the window, he opened the shutters. The full moon flooded the yard with yellow light, and the reflection of the apple trees made black shadows at their feet, while in the distance the fields gleamed, covered with the ripe corn. But as he was leaning out, listening to every sound in the still night, two bare arms were put round his neck, and his wife whispered, trying to pull hm back: "Do leave them alone; it has nothing to do with you. Come to bed."

He turned round, put his arms round her, and drew her toward him, but just as he was laying her on the bed, which yielded beneath her weight, they heard another report, considerably nearer this time, and Jean, giving way to his tumultuous rage, swore aloud: "Do you think I shall not go out and see what it is, because of you? . . . Wait, wait a few minutes!" He put on his shoes again, took down his gun, which was always hanging within reach against the wall, and, as his wife threw herself on

her knees in her terror to implore him not to go, he hastily freed himself, ran to the window, and jumped into the yard.

She waited one hour, two hours, until daybreak, but her husband did not return. Then she lost her head, aroused the house, related how angry Jean was, and said that he had gone after the poachers, and immediately all the male farm-servants, even the boys, went in search of their master. They found him two leagues from the farm, tied hand and foot, half dead with rage, his gun broken, his trousers turned inside out, and with three dead hares hanging round his neck, and a placard on his chest with these words: "Who goes on the chase loses his place."

In later years, when he used to tell this story of his wedding night, he usually added: "Ah! as far as a joke went it was a good joke. They caught me in a snare, as if I had been a rabbit, the dirty brutes, and they shoved my head into a bag. But if I can only catch them some day they had better look out for themselves!"

That is how they amuse themselves in Normandy on a wedding day.

A COCK CROWED

MADAME BERTHA D'AVANCELLES had up to that time resisted all the prayers of her despairing adorer, Baron Joseph de Croissard. He had pursued her ardently in Paris during the winter, and now he was giving fêtes and shooting-parties in her honor at his château at Carville, in Normandy.

Monsieur d'Avancelles, her husband, saw nothing and knew nothing, as usual. It was said that he lived apart from his wife on account of physical weakness, for which Madame d'Avancelles would not pardon him. He was a short, stout, bald man, with short arms, legs, neck, nose, and everything else, while Madame d'Avancelles, on the contrary, was a tall, dark, and determined young woman, who laughed in her husband's face with sonorous laughter while he called her openly Madame Housewife, who looked at the broad shoulders, strong build

and fair mustaches of her titled admirer, the Baron Joseph de Croissard, with tenderness.

She had not, however, granted him anything as yet. The Baron was ruining himself for her, and there was a constant round of fêting, hunting parties, and new pleasures, to which he invited the neighboring nobility. All day long the hounds gave tongue in the woods, as they followed the fox or the wild boar, and every night dazzling fireworks mingled their burning plumes with the stars, while the illuminated windows of the drawing-room cast long rays of light upon the wide lawns, where shadows were moving to and fro.

It was autumn, the russet-colored season of the year, and the leaves were whirling about on the grass like flights of birds. One noticed the smell of damp earth in the air, of the naked earth, as one smells the odor of the bare skin when a woman's dress falls off her, after a ball.

One evening the previous spring, during an entertainment, Madame d'Avancelles had said to Monsieur de Croissard, who was worrying her with his importunities: "If I do yield to you, my friend, it will not be before the fall of the leaf. I have too many things to do this summer to have any time for it." He had not forgotten that bold and amusing speech, and every day he became more pressing, every day he pushed his approaches nearer—to use a military phrase—and gained a step in the heart of the fair, audacious woman, who seemed only to be resisting for form's sake.

It was the day before a large wild-boar hunt, and in the evening Madame Bertha said to the Baron, with a laugh: "Baron, if you kill the brute I shall have something to say to you." And so at

dawn he was up and out, to try to discover where the solitary animal had its lair. He accompanied his huntsmen, settled the places for the relays, and organized everything personally to insure his triumph, and when the horns gave the signal for setting out, he appeared in a closely fitting coat of scarlet and gold, with his waist drawn in tight, his chest expanded, his eyes radiant, and as fresh and strong as if he had just got out of bed. They set off, and the wild boar dashed through the underwood as soon as he was dislodged, followed by the hounds in full cry, while the horses raced at a gallop through the narrow rides cut in the forest, and the carriage which followed the chase at a distance drove noiselessly along the soft roads.

From mischief Madame d'Avancelles kept the Baron by her side, and lagging behind at a walk in an interminably long and straight drive, over which four rows of oaks hung, so as to form almost an arch, while he, trembling with love and anxiety, listened with one ear to the young woman's bantering chatter, and with the other he listened to the blast of the horns and to the cry of the hounds as they receded in the distance.

"So you do not love me any more?" she said.

"How can you say such things?" he replied.

"But you seem to be paying more attention to the sport than to me," she continued.

He groaned and said: "Did you not order me to kill the animal myself?"

She replied gravely: "Of course I reckon upon it. You must kill it under my eyes."

Then he trembled in his saddle, spurred his horse until it reared, and, losing all patience, exclaimed: "But, by Jove, Madame, that is impossible if we

remain here!" Then she spoke tenderly to him, laying her hand on his arm, or stroking his horse's mane, as if from abstraction, and said with a laugh: "But you must do it . . . or else . . . so much the worse for you."

Just then they turned to the right, into a narrow path which was overhung by trees, and suddenly, to avoid a branch which barred their way, she leaned toward him so close that he felt her hair tickling his neck. He suddenly threw his arms brutally round her, and putting his thick mustache upon her forehead, he gave her a furious kiss.

At first she did not move and remained motionless under that mad caress; then she turned her head with a jerk, and either by accident or design her little lips met his, under their wealth of light hair. A moment afterward, either from confusion or remorse, she struck her horse with her riding-whip and went off at full gallop, and they rode on like that for some time, without a word.

The noise of the hunt came nearer, the thickets seemed to tremble, and suddenly the wild boar broke through the bushes, covered with blood, and trying to shake off the hounds which had fastened on him.

The Baron, uttering a shout of triumph, exclaimed: "Let him who loves me follow me!" And he disappeared in the copse, as if the wood had swallowed him up.

When the lady reached a glade a few minutes later, he was just getting up, covered with mud, his coat torn, and his hands bloody, while the brute was lying stretched out at full length with the Baron's hunting-knife driven into its shoulder up to the hilt.

The quarry was cut at night by torchlight. It was a warm and dull evening, and the wan moon

threw a yellow light over the torches which made the night misty with their resinous smoke. The hounds devoured the wild boar's stinking entrails, and snarled and fought for them, while the prickers and the gentlemen, standing in a circle round the spoil, blew their horns as loud as they could. The flourish of the hunting-horns resounded beyond the woods on that still night and was repeated by the echoes of the distant valleys, awaking the timid stags, rousing the yelping foxes and disturbing the rabbits in their gambols at the edge of the roads.

The frightened nightbirds flew over the eager pack of hounds, while the women, who were moved by all these happenings, leaned rather heavily on the men's arms and turned aside into the forest paths before the hounds had finished their meal. Madame d'Avancelles, feeling languid after that day of fatigue and tenderness, said to the Baron: "Will you take a turn in the park, my friend?" And without replying, but trembling and nervous, he went with her, and immediately they kissed each other. They walked slowly under the almost leafless trees through which the moonbeams filtered, and could scarcely control their love, their desires, their longing.

The horns were not sounding any longer, and the tired hounds were sleeping in the kennels. "Let us return," the lady said, and they went back.

When they got to the château and before they went in, she said in a weak voice: "I am so tired that I shall go to bed, my friend." And as he attempted to kiss her she ran away, saying as a last good-by: "No . . . I am going to sleep. . . . Let him who loves me follow me!"

An hour later, when the whole silent château

seemed dead, the Baron crept stealthily out of his room and went and scratched at her door, and as she did not reply he tried to open it, and found that it was not locked.

She was in a reverie, resting her arms against the window ledge, and he threw himself at her knees, which he kissed madly through the night-dress. She said nothing, but buried her delicate fingers caressingly in his hair, and suddenly, as if she had formed some great resolution, she whispered with her daring look: "I shall come back; wait for me." And stretching out her hand, she pointed with her finger to an indistinct white spot at the end of the room; it was her bed.

Then, with trembling hands and scarcely knowing what he was doing, he quickly undressed, got into the cool sheets, and stretching himself out comfortably, he almost forgot his love in the pleasure he found, tired out as he was, in the contact of the linen. She did not return, however, no doubt finding amusement in making him languish. He closed his eyes with a feeling of exquisite comfort, and reflected peaceably while waiting for what he so ardently longed for. But by degrees his limbs grew languid and his thoughts became indistinct and fleeting, until his fatigue gained the upper hand and he fell asleep.

He slept that unconquerable, heavy sleep of the worn-out hunter, and he slept until daylight; and then, as the window had remained half open, the crowing of a cock suddenly woke him, and the Baron opened his eyes, and, feeling a woman's body against his, finding himself, much to his surprise, in a strange bed, and remembering nothing for the moment, he stammered:

"What? Where am I? What is the matter?"

Then she, who had not been asleep at all, looking at this unkempt man, with red eyes and swollen lips, replied in the haughty tone of voice in which she occasionally spoke to her husband:

"It is nothing; it is only a cock crowing. Go to sleep, Monsieur; it has nothing to do with you."

DREAMS

THEY had just dined together, five old friends, a writer, a doctor, and three rich bachelors without any profession.

They had talked about everything, and a feeling of lassitude came over them, that feeling which precedes and leads to the departure of guests after festive gatherings. One of those present, who had for the last five minutes been gazing silently at the surging boulevard dotted with gas lamps, with its rattling vehicles, said suddenly:

"When you've nothing to do from morning till night, the days are long."

"And the nights, too," assented the guest who sat next to him. "I sleep very little; pleasures fatigue me; conversation is monotonous. Never do I come across a new idea, and I feel, before talking to any one, a violent longing to say nothing and to listen to nothing. I don't know what to do with my evenings."

The third idler remarked:

"I would pay a great deal for anything that would help me pass two pleasant hours every day.

The writer, who had just thrown his overcoat across his arm, turned round to them, and said:

"The man who could discover a new vice and introduce it among his fellow creatures, even if it were to shorten their lives, would render a greater service to humanity than the man who found the means of securing to them eternal salvation and eternal youth."

The doctor burst out laughing, and, while he chewed his cigar, said:

"Yes, but it is not so easy to discover it. Men have, however crudely, been seeking for and working for the object you refer to since the beginning of the world. The men who came first reached perfection at once in this way. We are hardly equal to them."

One of the three idlers murmured:

"What a pity!"

Then, after a minute's pause, he added:

"If we could only sleep, sleep well, without feeling hot or cold, sleep with that perfect unconsciousness we experience on nights when we are thoroughly fatigued, sleep without dreams."

"Why without dreams?" asked the guest sitting next to him.

The other replied:

"Because dreams are not always pleasant; they are always fantastic, improbable, disconnected; and because when we are asleep we cannot have the sort of dreams we like. We ought to dream waking."

"And what's to prevent you?" asked the writer.

The doctor flung away the end of his cigar.

"My dear fellow, in order to dream when you are awake you need great power and great exercise of will, and when you try to do it, great weariness is the result. Now, real dreaming, that journey of our thoughts through delightful visions, is assuredly the sweetest experience in the world; but it must come naturally, it must not be provoked in a painful manner, and must be accompanied by absolute bodily comfort. This power of dreaming I can give you, provided you promise that you will not abuse it."

The writer shrugged his shoulders:

"Ah! yes, I know—hasheesh, opium, green tea—artificial paradises. I have read Baudelaire, and I even tasted the famous drug, which made me very sick."

But the doctor, without stirring, said:

"No; ether, nothing but ether; and I would suggest that you literary men should use it sometimes."

The three rich bachelors drew closer.

One of them said:

"Explain to us the effects of it."

And the doctor replied:

"Let us put aside big words, shall we not? I am not talking of medicine or morality; I am talking of pleasure. You give yourselves up every day

to excesses which consume your lives. I want to indicate to you a new sensation, possible only to intelligent men—let us say even very intelligent men —dangerous, like everything that overexcites our organs, but exquisite. I might add that you would require a certain preparation, that is to say, practice, to feel in all their completeness the singular effects of ether.

" They are different from the effects of hasheesh, of opium, or morphia, and they cease as soon as the absorption of the drug is interrupted, while the other generators of day dreams continue their action for hours.

" I am now going to try to analyze these feelings as clearly as possible. But the thing is not easy, so facile, so delicate, so almost imperceptible, are these sensations.

" It was when I was attacked by violent neuralgia that I made use of this remedy, which since then I have, perhaps, slightly abused.

" I had acute pains in my head and neck, and an intolerable heat of the skin, a feverish restlessness. I took up a large bottle of ether, and, lying down, I began to inhale it slowly.

" At the end of some minutes I thought I heard a vague murmur, which ere long became a sort of humming, and it seemed to me that all the interior of my body had become light, light as air, that it was dissolving into vapor.

" Then came a sort of torpor, a sleepy sensation of comfort, in spite of the pains which still continued, but which had ceased to make themselves felt. It was one of those sensations which we are willing to endure and not any of those frightful wrenches against which our tortured body protests.

" Soon the strange and delightful sense of emptiness which I felt in my chest extended to my limbs, which, in their turn, became light, as light as if the flesh and the bones had been melted and the skin only were left, the skin necessary to enable me to realize the sweetness of living, of bathing in this sensation of well-being. Then I perceived that I was no longer suffering. The pain had gone, melted away, evaporated. And I heard voices, four voices, two dialogues, without understanding what was said. At one time there were only indistinct sounds, at another time a word reached my ear. But I recognized that this was only the humming I had heard before, but emphasized. I was not asleep; I was not awake; I comprehended, I felt, I reasoned with the utmost clearness and depth, with extraordinary energy and intellectual pleasure, with a singular intoxication arising from this separation of my mental faculties.

" It was not like the dreams caused by hasheesh or the somewhat sickly visions that come from opium; it was an amazing acuteness of reasoning, a new way of seeing, judging, and appreciating the things of life, and with the certainty, the absolute consciousness, that this was the true way.

" And the old image of the Scriptures suddenly came back to my mind. It seemed to me that I had tasted of the Tree of Knowledge, that all the mysteries were unveiled, so much did I find myself under the sway of a new, strange, and irrefutable logic. And arguments, reasonings, proofs, rose up in a heap before my brain only to be immediately displaced by some stronger proof, reasoning, argument. My head had, in fact, become a battleground of ideas. I was a superior being, armed with invin-

cible intelligence, and I experienced a huge delight at the manifestation of my power.

"It lasted a long, long time. I still kept inhaling the ether from my flagon. Suddenly I perceived that it was empty."

The four men exclaimed at the same time:

"Doctor, a prescription for a liter of ether!"

But the doctor, putting on his hat, replied:

"As to that, certainly not; go and let some one else poison you!"

And he left them.

Ladies and gentlemen, what is your opinion on the subject?